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# CHRISTIANCOURIER

## Budget cuts target the most vulnerable

**Chandra Pasma**

"Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be," says the Bible. This observation applies quite literally to governments: where they are willing to spend reveals what and who they value. It's why budgets are so important; spending speaks louder than words.

Canada has a deficit at the federal level due to stimulus spending to counter the impacts of the 2008-09 recession. The Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, has said that Canada's economy is still weak enough that the government should not be cutting spending since it risks damaging the fragile economic recovery. However, rather than eliminating the deficit eventually through economic growth, the Conservative government has chosen to slash government spending by \$5.6 billion.

Even after deciding in favour of spending cuts, the government had another important choice regarding who should pay for the spending cuts through lost programs and services. According to the government, the answer seems to be the most vulnerable among us: seniors, low income Canadians, First Nations and the environment.

And thus the government reveals where its heart is. It could have asked the rich to pay through higher taxes or through elimination of lucrative tax deductions that favour the rich. It could have asked the military to pay by cut-

ting the purchase of F-35 fighter jets by five or six planes. It could have asked wealthy corporations to pay by clawing back billions in corporate tax cuts that have padded corporate coffers without creating new jobs. But the government chose to protect the rich and the well-off by asking the most vulnerable to pay instead.

### Turning our back on the poor

While the federal government has habitually ignored poverty in recent years, it is rare for the government to adopt a policy that will actually increase poverty.

## Ministering to prisoners

**Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning**

The brick façade of Edmonton's Grierson Institution makes it look more like a museum or a redeveloped condominium than a prison. If not for the small "Correctional Services of Canada" sign at the entrance to the building, passers-by would have little idea that the building is a hub for the criminal justice sector in Northern Alberta, housing a 30-bed minimum-security prison, parole offices, and an Aboriginal halfway house.

Looking south from Grierson, you can see much of Edmonton's expansive river valley. A small chain-link fence and sparse shrubs are the only barriers be-



Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and Prime Minister Stephen Harper give "thumbs up" to their new budget, which in reality deserves a "thumbs down" for placing the burden of spending cuts on the most vulnerable.

However, that is what Budget 2012 did in raising the age for receiving Old Age Security benefits to 67. Old Age Security and the

Guaranteed Income Supplement which accompanies it keep many seniors out of poverty. For Canadians receiving social assistance

benefits, turning 65 often represents the turning point at which they are able to exit poverty and enter a new life of dignity with a modest but sufficient income. Now as many as 25 percent of seniors could be living in poverty while they wait to turn 67.

The changes are also being phased in over such a long period that it is today's youth who will receive the full impact of the changes – the same youth who are also finding it difficult to save for retirement, given high youth unemployment, growing education debt, unaffordable housing and stagnating wages. Meanwhile the budget failed to even mention affordable housing and offered only a pittance for youth employment.

The budget also eliminated an important voice for the poor: the

*See Budget on page 2*



The Grierson Institution correctional facility in Edmonton, Alta.

in these "middle places," where offenders slowly re-engage the world that they left behind when they entered prison. It is in these coffee shops and apartments – part of our neighbourhoods, but

largely out of the public eye – where offenders confront the hard realities of their pasts and attempt to build new futures.

As a Reintegration Chaplain, I  
*See Ministering on page 2*



## News

Budget *continued*

National Council of Welfare (NCW). The NCW was an arms-length advisory body to the Minister that provided the only source of pan-Canadian information on welfare, in addition to conducting important research on poverty. The Conservatives justified the move by arguing that the NCW was duplicating work done by non-governmental organizations, but anti-poverty NGOs have protested that they depended on the data and research produced by the NCW. And the grand savings achieved by ending this 50-year-old institution that defended the rights and interests of the poor? \$1.1 million a year.

## Giving with one hand

At the Crown-First Nations summit in January, the government made a big deal out of announcing a new relationship with Canada's First Nations. The budget appears to make a promising first step in resetting the relationship: despite the significant cuts in the budget, the government set aside \$275 million over three years for First Nations education and \$175 million to build and renovate schools on reserves. This is a good investment, however it falls far short of what the Assembly of First Nations has said is needed to bring funding for First Nations education to parity with non-Aboriginal Canadians.

What the government gave with one hand though, it took away with the other. Significant cuts have been made to Aboriginal health programs, including funding for the National Aboriginal Health Organization (which will now close its doors), the Assembly of First Nations, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the Native Women's Association of Canada, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatam, Pauktutit Inuit Women of Canada, and the Métis Nation of Canada.

Ministering *continued*

journey with men and women who have left or are preparing to leave the prison system. Caring for these people and providing accountability, I give support wherever it is needed. Sometimes that means advocating in the job or housing market, or working to find someone a new church community. It can also mean helping people in processing feelings of guilt or grief, or in navigating the inevitable tension that comes from re-connecting with their families. In every case, I am invited to hear peoples' stories.

## Inmates' stories

Matt\* spent most of his sentence in a tough prairie prison, but is now completing the tail end of his time at Grierson. With less than a year left, he hoped to have a job release in Edmonton to save money for his first month's rent. However, Matt underestimated the scope of his mental illness and the challenges it would present in finding work. He now spends most of his days walking the parking lot at the prison, looking out over the river valley.

When I ask him what he thinks about on his walks, he immediately says: "My daughter." Matt's former wife was deemed an unfit mother, and his daughter is now in the care of Child Services. Hoping to maintain speaking privileges, Matt is constantly trying to find his way through a mess of government bureaucracy. Limited telephone time at the prison makes this almost impossible.

When he does get through to someone, he has a hard time explaining why he should be able to speak with his child. "Yes, I have mental illness, but I'm dealing with it.... Yes, I'm incarcerated, but it was my only offence and I'm making a new start...." After getting nowhere on this by himself, he now spends his precious telephone minutes with a free legal aid service, trying to understand his rights in this situation.

The stress has taken its toll on Matt. At one point he



*"Aboriginal Canadians have lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality rates, and higher rates of disability, injury, and chronic and infectious diseases. So why are we cutting their health programs?"*

These organizations provided research, policy development, public education and health programs for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Canadians, who have some of the worst health outcomes in the country. Aboriginal Canadians have lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality rates, and higher rates of disability, injury, and chronic and infectious diseases. So why are we cutting their health programs? Shouldn't we be investing more?

The budget also eliminated the First Nations Statistical Institute and the National Centre for First Nations Governance. There will therefore now be significant gaps in the data available regarding First Nations and big holes in the supports available to First Nations communities.

## War on the environment

Finally, the budget inflicts major cuts on environmental assessments and clamps down on charities that seek to

protect the environment. Environment Canada is being cut by \$88.2 million while Natural Resources Canada is losing \$108.3 million. Among the work to be sacrificed is the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy, which studies climate change and the economy. Meanwhile, the review process for major projects will be gutted, with reviews limited to two years regardless of the size of the project and a new patchwork system of assessments to be created through the adoption of a "one project, one review" approach. At the end of these reviews, cabinet will have the right to approve a project regardless of the review's outcome.

The budget also sets aside \$8 million to investigate charities that are suspected of undertaking political activities. Many see this move as a response to what the government has complained are "radical groups" trying to "hijack" environmental assessments, rather than acknowledging the legitimate role of civil society groups in defending and protecting the environment.

Budget 2012 sets the tone for a government agenda that erodes the foundations of a caring society that looks after the most vulnerable among us. Instead of everyone contributing as they can to promote the common good, the budget offers a scenario in which the poor, the marginalized and the environment pay the costs of political choices that marginalize them even further. The government has revealed that its treasure, and therefore its heart, lies with the rich and the powerful, not with the least among us. ➤

*Chandra Pasma is an Ottawa-based policy analyst.*



says he examined the trees surrounding the parking lot, determining which would work best to hang himself. He is no longer at such a low point, but he still struggles to maintain hope – particularly as his release date inches closer. With no housing possibilities on the horizon and little support from his family, Matt thinks he may end up sleeping in the nearby ravine, where he was staying before his arrest four years ago.

While Matt's story is particularly difficult, it also illustrates many of the issues that are common among those leaving prison: mental illness, addiction issues, little formal education, lack of stable housing before and after incarceration and little community support. Leaving prison is much more complicated than simply walking out the gates. Believe it or not, Matt and others like him are much more anxious about moving into our communities than we are about receiving them.

The journey out of prison can also be stressful for those who appear to have fewer obstacles than Matt. For Carl\*, the move back to Edmonton seemed like it would be relatively straightforward. After serving a short sentence for a crime committed in the middle of an alcohol addiction, Carl left prison sober and excited to make a fresh start.

When I met him for coffee shortly after his release, Carl's face exuded a mix of excitement and realism. His training as a plumber was providing some job opportunities, and he had already made positive connections with potential to provide good local support. He recognized the need to stay on top of his addiction through various support programs, and was committed to ongoing sobriety. I left our time together feeling optimistic that Carl would do well.

By our second meeting, Carl's excitement had turned to frustration. His boss was demanding, refusing to accommodate Carl's required day-time parole office ap-

pointments and asking him to work late despite his curfew at the halfway house. Carl's family in the city was less than welcoming. His search for a new church community was not going as well as he had hoped. His evenings were hectic and tiring as he tried to maintain his commitments to two 12-step meetings and another local support group. Life on the outside was not being kind to Carl.

## Involvement after prison

Many people who hear that I work with those affected by incarceration tell me that they have some experience volunteering with or supporting prisoners. These experiences are almost always *inside* prison – leading a chapel, playing sports, prison visitation, and the like. All of these opportunities are good and necessary. They combat the loneliness and isolation that many inmates can feel; they give inmates a chance to be treated as humans and not simply as "cons." They give prisoners a chance to make new connections with new people. Yet, for many of us, our involvement with offenders stops when they walk out of the prison doors.

This is unfortunate because it is at this time that inmates are often most in need of the support of healthy communities and life-giving relationships. This is especially true of inmates who are exploring Christian faith. While they hear about God's love for them while they are inside, it is the church's embodiment of that love through relationships of accountability and welcome on the outside that speaks loudest.

When people serving a prison sentence get out and return to wider society, we have to ask ourselves "What sort of community will they return to?" Will it be a community of welcome and loving accountability, or one of alienation and skepticism? Will churches embrace a vision of

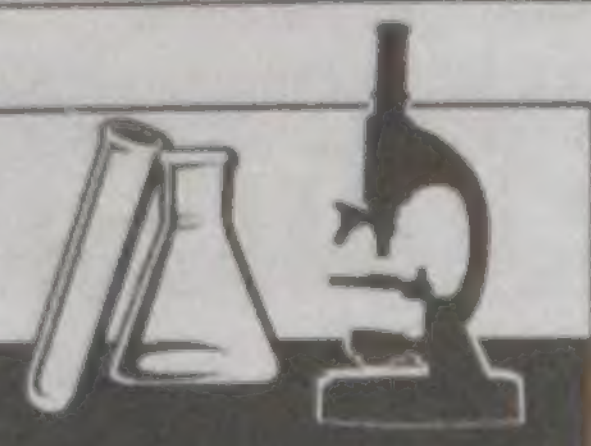
*See Ministering on page 3*



## Column

## From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



## Science stories: publish or perish



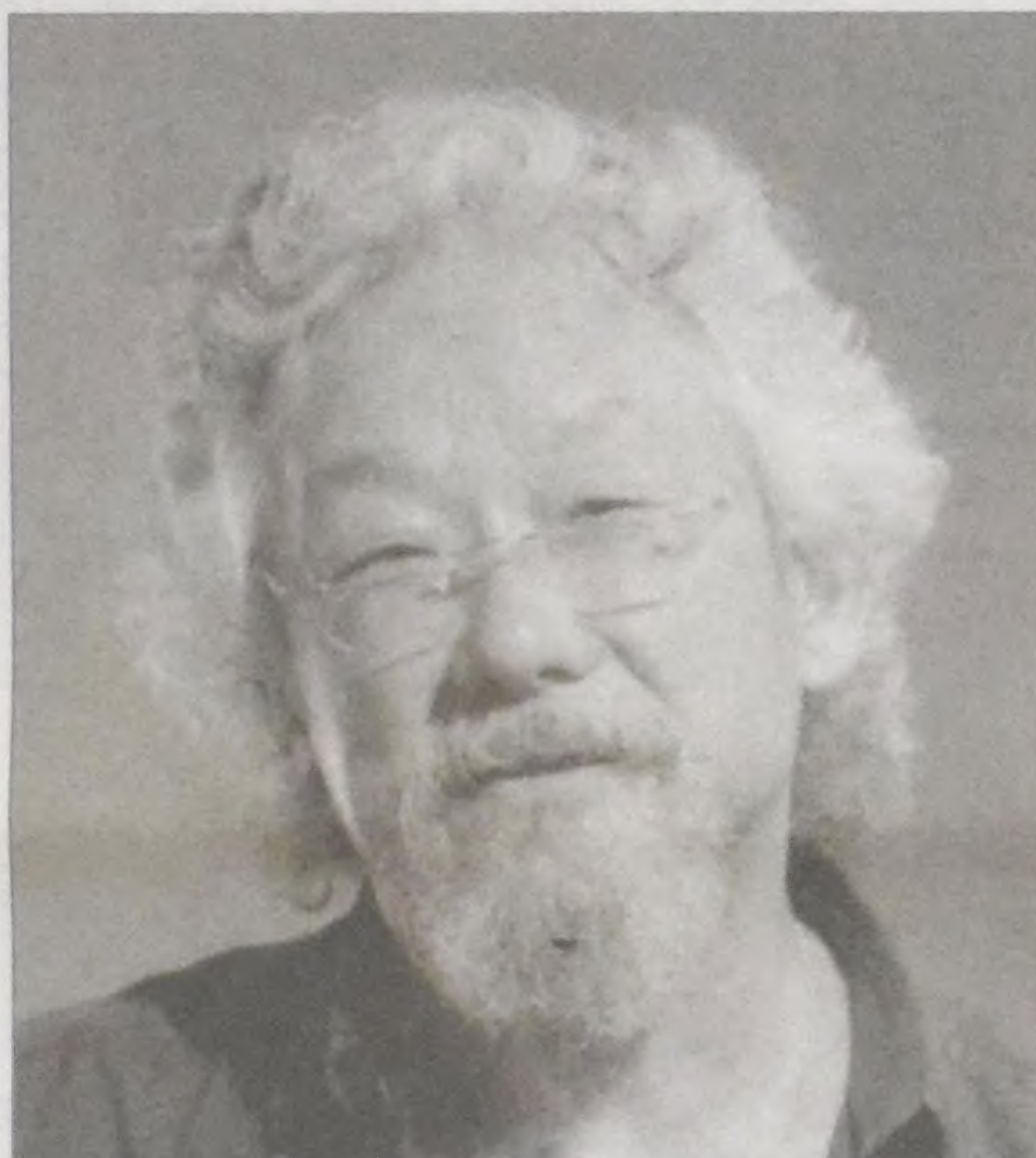
For scientific research to be deemed successful, many parts must come together, the last being a publication of the results. Peer-reviewed publication demonstrates that the research was adequately rigorous and significant to be shared with the scientific community. Publication is so important that academia has unofficially adopted the mantra "publish or perish": if you as a researcher don't produce work that is publishable, your academic career will likely be short.

What is also important, however, is being able to tell stories about our research to people who are not neuroscientists or academics. Doing so is not always easy. When I outline one of my research projects to an interested listener, I often get asked, "So what did you find?" Sounds like a simple question, but it is always difficult to answer.

Most scientists think about their research project as an unfinished story or narrative with many chapters. Each chapter, which results in an academic journal article, includes a given set of experiments with a specific question that is being clarified. However, if you look at the chapter (or article) in isolation, it may not be particularly informative. Often it is written in a highly technical manner, to help others evaluate, replicate, or extend the work. It is not a genre that is friendly for lay readers.

A specific research publication is generally part of a larger project or story in which we as scientists hope to clarify or illuminate some aspect of the creation. Often many articles are necessary to tell the story involved in our understanding of some issue. The road going forward is generally not very clear, and the implications of the research are sometimes evident only later when other pieces of the story become known.

Take, for example, an article I published with Sara Lattanzio in *Behavioural Neuroscience* in 2003 (117:496-504). If someone asks me, "So what did you find?" I can say, "We learned that for male rats, two hours of running-wheel access per day suppresses feeding as much as 24-hour-per-day wheel access," but this is not really what the person wants to know. The story of this particular experiment is that we are looking at a rat model, Wheel-Induced Feeding Suppression, which par-



Science broadcasters such as David Suzuki help communicate "science stories" to the public.

allels aspects of the human disorder anorexia nervosa, focusing on a paradoxical relationship between exercise and feeding. We believe that this paradoxical relationship maintains anorexia nervosa. What this particular paper found is that the introduction of even limited running exercise can suppress a rat's feeding. This experiment suggested to us an animal model to do pre-clinical testing of drugs that might help treat anorexia nervosa. Currently we have very few tools and medicines to help individuals suffering from this eating disorder and an appropriate animal model will help.

## Telling the story

As scientists it is important that we communicate this "story" aspect of our research. While the scientific community will ultimately evaluate and extend earlier research, we must not forget that others outside of our specific research area need to know the story of what is being developed. If we do not tell our stories, our efforts will perish on library shelves in bound journals.

Good teaching is one way that these individual stories are woven together into a fabric that students can take and use in meaningful and new ways. It is for this reason (among others) that universities usually require academics to do both research and teaching. Effective communication of scientific findings in a classroom can spark a student's interest and have a life-changing impact.

Not everyone is still in school, so we need to explore these science stories in other contexts too. Science shows on television and radio are one way to do this, and good journalists can frame a science story in truly engaging ways. In Canada we have been blessed by the work of David Suzuki and by CBC programs such as *Quirks and Quarks*. This column is my small attempt to introduce our community to some of the stories of science as they impact our lives.

I try to train my students to tell their specific science story to their parents and grandparents. My father admitted that after reading the first page of my doctoral dissertation, he closed the book and put it on the shelf as a memento; clearly, a dissertation is not a good story! If scientists don't publish our findings in a way that joyfully communicates to lay readers the story of God's wonderful creation, we all perish a little bit. ➤

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Ministering *continued*

justice that is restorative and healing, and embody it through practical concern for all those affected by crime – the victim and his family first and foremost, but also offenders and their family and friends?

Recent conversations about new criminal justice legislation – especially Bill C-10 – have brought issues of crime and incarceration closer to the fore of the public consciousness. Important questions are being asked: How do we create safe communities? How do we support victims? How do we keep offenders accountable while also supporting them in their healing? And what role, exactly, does prison have in all of this?

These conversations are important. Those of us in the Christian community have the opportunity to engage these discussions in a spirit of generosity and with a concern to embody God's shalom. Engaging in this way would require that we refuse to participate in the culture of fear that so often surrounds these discussions. What better way to work through our fear of the other – including those in prison – than by getting know their stories, journeying with them through the ups and downs of life on the outside?

In knowing and supporting those who've spent time in prison, we can become welcoming communities who are capable of acknowledging the harm that offenders have done while also supporting them in their new beginnings. We may, even, become communities capable of embodying the great Christian commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself." ➤

\* Names changed to protect privacy.

Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning lives with his wife Sarah in Edmonton's Alberta Avenue neighbourhood. He works as a community correctional chaplain at The Mustard Seed, an inner-city agency that seeks to build community, grow hope and support change alongside marginalized people in Edmonton.



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## Editorial

## Global warming, global cooling, global ignorance



Bert Witvoet

Recent news articles about global warming have caused me to wonder what is really going on around us on the climate front. I thought the question of human responsibility in causing significant and detrimental climate change had been well established. We have been told that except for a few stubborn and ignorant scientists the vast majority of scientists are in agreement that 1) we are experiencing global warming and that 2) humans are the cause of it. But how do we explain that cracks are appearing in this majority opinion?

Take an article in the Sept. 17, 2011 issue of the *National Post* by a certain Lawrence Solomon. He writes that the 52 percent of Canadians who believe that humans are mainly responsible for global warming are unaware that most top scientists have rejected the global warming dogma. He adds that Nobel Prize-winning physicist Ivar Giaever resigned as a fellow from the American Physical Society because "he could not live with its nonsensical endorsement of global warming alarmism." Solomon mentions several other dissenting top scientists from the U.S., Italy and France, including Antonino Zichichi, the president of the World Federation of Scientists. He also reports that Antarctica has been gaining ice overall and that what's happening in the Arctic Ocean is not unusual since it has been navigable several times over the last century.

More recently I read another article in the April 28, 2012 issue of the *National Post* by the same Lawrence Solomon, which reports that British environmentalist James Lovelock has admitted that he was alarmist on global warming. Some years ago he apparently predicted that global warming would cause billions of us to die and that only a few people in the Arctic will survive. He now says that we don't know what the climate is doing. Temperatures haven't increased as expected over the last 12 years.

Solomon blames the news media for not reporting these developments because it's not politically convenient to do so. The press, he says, does not report that there is an advance of ice in both the Arctic and the Antarctic, and that researchers at the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan and the Riken research foundation have announced that the world may be heading into a prolonged period of global cooling. Other studies show that climate change on earth may be driven by galactic cosmic rays rather than by human activity.



Lawrence Solomon reports that Antarctica has actually been gaining ice rather than losing it.

## Plea for justice

As I reflect on these articles I must point-out two obvious concerns: First of all, both articles are written by the same author, Lawrence Solomon, who has a longstanding interest in disproving that global warming is caused by humans; and, secondly, both articles appeared in the *National Post*, a conservative daily that is more favourably inclined to questioning global warming claims than some other Canadian dailies. That having been said, I, nevertheless, wonder why we don't hear more about these contradictory findings by scientists. Should there not be an open debate about these issues, also in the press?

I am not a scientist, and so I have nothing to contribute to the actual debate other than to ask for a lifting of taboos at universities and in the media. I'm quite aware of the lack of freedom of speech in various sensitive areas in our society. Frankly, I am also confused and sceptical about all those who claim to have great certainty about global warming or global cooling and their causes.

I do know one thing: we as Christians must never yield on the question of exercising faithful stewardship when it comes to the environment and the earth we live on. We know that various ideologies justify the pollution of soil, water and air, first among them the economic growth ideology. Human greed and human carelessness also cause much damage to life on earth. So I am not in favour of giving the green light to all kinds of projects that definitely harm the quality of life on earth, including the organisms that live and breed in water, soil and air. We need to be vigilant and be very honest about our human tendency to foul our own nest.

Christ came to restore not only human beings but also the earth and its plants and animals. But that restoration comes through the hearts and minds of people who avoid political bandwagons and who long for justice and righteousness in a social climate of respect, humility and obedience.

Bert and Alice Witvoet live in St. Catharines, Ont., where they continually find themselves picking up discarded plastic and paper items in Burgoyne Woods, where they walk every morning. Littering is a seemingly insignificant matter, but it reflects an attitude.

## Comment

## Another dimension to the Christian schools debate



Harry Boessenkool

Regarding the recent discussion of Christian schools (see CC May 14, April 23, March 26, Feb. 13, and Dec. 12, 2011), allow me to add another dimension that draws in parents, teachers, administration and Board. It has been my experience that Christian schools take their mission and mandate statements too casually. A year or more may be spent on putting together such statements, especially if a new Principal or several new Board members join the school society. It is very possible that in 10 years such a review or process may be undertaken three times. But most of these statements end up being abstract and general, with very little factual support provided in the background documents.

A school could end up with flowery statements but no future projections of enrolment and financial information. No analysis of the school catchment area demographics. In places like Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton (all places where we have lived and served on Christian school Boards) this can lead to very expensive building programs in the wrong locations or lack of building programs in growing areas. The lack of detailed study of municipal and provincial demographics is also a major omission. This information is readily available down to the level of postal codes. A review of birth rates in the mid '90s would have clearly shown the downward trends that were coming in school-aged children. A study of (all) the Christian churches located in the school's catchment area and visiting competing Christian schools to see what plans they have is rarely done.

All this is to point out that, in the last five years, Christian schools in most provinces have had to cope with declining enrolments that occurred over a relatively short period. The good news (in B.C. at least) was that public school enrolments were dropping much faster than those of independent schools. As has been pointed out in the previous articles, church attendance is declining and loyalty to the Christian school is declining.

In this context the Christian school response has been (and still is) to hire Development Directors and put programs in place to increase enrolment. This, of course, meant trying to gain "market share" of available children. Readers familiar with business will know that gaining market share is a very tricky and potentially expensive undertaking. In some Christian schools what happened was an increase in enrolment but also an increase in tuition arrears (or non-payment of tuition). The latter has often been caused by the mission and mandate of the school which – I will say simplistically – tend to state that all comers are welcome and that the school plays a missionary role. It is pretty obvious who ends up paying the bills of the potentially excess teaching staff, development people and arrears or non-payment of tuition. On this point John Tamming and I agree: it is the loyal parents who have always supported Christian education.

## Board mistakes

I particularly fault Boards for not adequately sharing enrolment forecasts and not clearly providing information on student to teacher ratios (20:1 is my rule of thumb – my study of the Christian Schools in B.C. a number of years ago found the actual numbers ranging from a low of 10 students per teacher to a high of 22, with an average of about 14). Boards are also at fault for failing to maintain information showing the number of parents who are paying tuition and not adequately sharing the reality of tuition arrears situations.

With these four items in hand any financial problem at the school becomes quickly obvious to its community. At the membership meetings of Christian schools this information is not readily provided in writing. Oral questions are answered poorly and real problems tend to be masked until drastic action is needed. And with 75-80 percent of school expenses consisting of salaries, you can guess what action that will be. When teachers are let go in such situations, Christian schools often do a less than adequate job – a fact which has been pointed out by other contributors to this discussion.

See Another dimension on page 5

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## Letters

### Disturbing developments

Two articles in recent issues of *CC* (March 26 and April 9) are most disturbing. The first deals with the Education Act in Alberta. Part of it states that "homeschoolers and faith-based schools will not be permitted to teach, as part of their academic program, that homosexual acts are sinful."

I was reminded of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Big Brother and the thought police are here in Canada.

The other article reports on an Ontario

judge who not only insulted a defendant before him, but also judged and condemned her God. Again, in Canada!

All of this reminded me of the often-quoted discovery by *Pogo*, "we have seen the enemy, and he is us." I hope that these unsettling developments will get full attention in future editions of *CC*'s The Public Square column.

Lippe C. de Haan  
Exeter, Ont.

### Pacifism

On Dec. 5, 1967 I was conscripted into the Dutch army. On that day my commanding officer stated that we were there to learn to kill, and about half a year later that meant including possibly Dutch people. His blunt words made me think for the first time about the commandment not to kill. I could not really reconcile the two statements, and army chaplains were absolutely useless helping in solving this conflict. Quite unlike for Brent van Staalduinen, my army experience, notably learning to kill, had nothing redemptive for me

("This unexpected love" *CC* April 23). This negative army experience contributed to my long road towards pacifism. That I have not arrived at a complete understanding of all the issues involved became apparent from Harry Kooy's "A challenging perspective on pacifism" (*CC* March 26), which contained a reference to Gil Bailie's *Violence Unveiled*, a book I was not familiar with. If Baillie is correct then Christian pacifism is on the right track.

Bert den Boggende  
Brooks, Alta.

### God's sovereignty

Christianity professes God's sovereignty over the cosmos. Preserving orthodoxy, too, remains an issue regularly discussed in evangelical circles. When it comes to defending the faith, however, it seems Marian Van Til holds contradictory views regarding God's sovereignty – at least as she expresses them in her article "Who do you say I am?" (*CC* March 26).

I am not sure how Van Til can reconcile a God of the cosmos, which also includes apostates and Muslims, needing the assistance of the faithful to preserve his cosmological order. She commends "defending the infinite glory of his name," as if the creator of the universe can seriously be of-

fended by anything we do. If God is indeed infinite, his word should remain paramount in spite of the Muslim horde and pesky apostates. If it does not, questions regarding the validity of the belief system need serious consideration.

Furthermore, Van Til's language reveals a troubling militancy. "True children" implies the existence of false, or illegitimate, children. If the God of the cosmos needs protection from such illegitimacy, what then prevents a return to inquisition and persecution? Unfortunately, church history is stained in blood as a result of this kind of reasoning.

Ray Stellingwerff  
Surrey, B.C.

### Another dimension to the Christian schools debate *continued*

I believe organizations owe it to their employees to keep them informed of the organization's financial situation. This is even more important in Christian organizations, churches and charities, which rely on voluntary membership to stay in business. In the case of Christian schools, the school Board is responsible to provide this information in a clear and concise manner. When enrolment projections fail to materialize, plans must be made to accommodate this. When the student to teacher ratio is under 20:1, the Board should have a very good explanation of why this is so. If tuition write-offs are over two percent of tuition payments, a clear plan to solve this problem must be presented. A decrease in the number of tuition paying parents is an early warning signal of declining enrolments. The trend is that there are fewer children per family.

When the above information is presented to all stakeholders, you will be surprised where solutions can come from. Parents who see their tuition being affected may donate some time or money. Teachers may come with solutions of their own. Boards will be free to ask for help because they have identified the problems. This is when the community that Bert Witvoet mentioned will come into play. This is when support from the OACS or SCSBC can be called in.

In the end, if the letting go of staff is the only solution, then a process must be found that works and is equitable for staff, parents, Board and the entire community. The last thing a Christian school needs is headlines in the local paper about how it has dealt with a staff separation or downsizing. ✕

*Harry Boessenkool is a retired banker who has served on Christian school boards in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. He and his wife Joanne are members of First Christian Reformed Church in New Westminster, B.C.*

### Responding to Rang

Lloyd Rang's article "Taking joy seriously" (*CC* April 9) starts off with a description of a game that he enjoyed when he was a child. It consisted of running downhill with your arms flung wide, which gave him a feeling as if he was flying. I have no problem with that at all, because I remember doing things like that from the time when I was a child a long time ago. Moreover, the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:11 "When I was a child, I reasoned like a child, I talked like a child." So far so good.

However, Rang uses this childish experience to make clear to us how to practise every day life as a full grown human being, and I quote "To this day that is my definition of joy. Joy is running downhill, with your arms outstretched, and smiling." Sorry Lloyd, my life experiences are not quite like that. You quote Henry Ward Beecher saying "The art of being happy lies in the power of extracting happiness from common things." But what are common things? Common things are temporal, things that come to an end: relationships, security, scientific advancement, a singing bird, you name it. Now do not get me wrong: these things have great value, they are blessings of God bestowed upon a corrupt world. They come under the heading of "Common Grace."

But we cannot extract true everlasting joy from temporal, common things. It is our relationship with the Lord, in and through his son Jesus Christ by faith that gives us everlasting happiness and joy. Rang quotes John 15:11 where it says "I

have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." What did the Lord Jesus tell them? To extract joy from common things? I think not. He told them "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (verse 5). It is clear that everlasting joy depends totally on a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus, and not on our ability to extract joy from common things.

Bear in mind the many circumstances in life in which there are very few so-called "common things" left to extract happiness from. Remember our persecuted brothers all over the world, being jailed, tortured, fleeing for their lives and going hungry. Their churches are burned, their houses demolished and still they rejoice in the Lord. Why? Because they have a living relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Rang also criticizes the behaviour of Evangelical Christians when they are active in politics, speak out in the abortion debate, or when they – in his opinion – demand the right to discriminate against people on religious grounds. Does he not know that followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are called to speak out against unholy practices in society? It disturbs him that there is always an evangelical group wagging their finger at something, or sticking their "long blue noses into sexual issues." So what? That is the God-given responsibility they have. Could it be that acting out that responsibility makes extracting joy from common things difficult?

Bill van Oene  
St. Thomas, Ont.

### Remember the Red Cross

Regarding Mary VanderVennen's article on Remembrance Day and remembering (*CC* Nov. 14, 2011), I agreed with the article but missed something very much. VanderVennen wrote a lot about what the soldiers had accomplished, but she never mentioned anything about the Red Cross. I have been with this organization, as a donor, for 42

years. And yes, I grew up in Holland and experienced the war years as a child.

J. Cupido  
Edmonton, Alta.

*Ed's note: Christian Courier apologizes for the delay in printing this letter. This is second time it has been sent, as we seem to have misplaced it the first time around.*

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## News

## Ottawa: March for Life smashes previous attendance records



OTTAWA (LifeSiteNews.com) – Under the constant threat of rain that failed to materialize, an exuberant and record-breaking crowd of nearly 20,000 pro-life activists gathered on Parliament Hill on May 10.

The annual event marks the passage of the late Prime Minister Trudeau's infamous "Omnibus Bill" in 1969, which struck down Canada's ban on abortion and paved the way for abortion-on-demand.

As he does every year, Jim Hughes, national president of Campaign Life Coalition, stood on the side of the road counting individual marchers as they walked by. Hughes told LifeSiteNews that he began doing the head count years ago because he was concerned about distorted estimates from both sides of the issue. This year he counted a record-breaking 19,500 attendees, smashing the previous record, set at last year's event, of 15,000.

"It was wonderful to see so many people dedicated to restoring the right to life to all human beings," Hughes told LifeSiteNews. A group of about 75 pro-abortion counter-protesters were also present.

The annual March for Life, which is now the largest annual rally on Parliament Hill, has steadily grown from a few thousand in 1999 to this year's record-breaking numbers.

The boisterous and notably youthful crowd was energized by dynamic music from Survive 88 which blared out across Parliament Hill and into the streets. The young band is made up of alumni and students from Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Academy, a Catholic college in Barry's Bay, Ont.

Long-time march organizer Margie Mountain opened the event with a dedication to the late Fr. Bob Bedard, an Ottawa native who founded the Companions of the Cross community of priests, and a revered man of faith with strong and outspoken pro-life convictions.

Masters of Ceremony Alissa Golob and Matthew Wojciechowski of Campaign Life Coalition then welcomed Sharon Milan to lead the national anthem, followed by Don

Hutchinson, vice president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), who opened the event with a prayer.

## Praying to become obsolete

"We stand together in awe and wonder at the miracle of life," Hutchinson said. "And we pray that the day will come when this gathering will not be necessary; when justice will be restored for the innocent voiceless; and our nation will be renewed in its foundation of dignity and respect for all human beings."

As always, the rally before the March featured addresses from numerous pro-life Members of Parliament, including Tory MP Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre), who has put forward a motion calling for Parliament to re-examine the humanity of the unborn.

The speakers' list included numerous other pro-life leaders and Christian denominational leaders. The youngest speaker was 17-year-old Alexandra Jezierski, who launched a bold campaign in March called Letters4Life with the goal of sending 100,000 letters to Prime Minister Stephen Harper by the day the March for Life took place. The letters urged the Prime Minister to reverse his stance against debating abortion.

## Fundamental absurdity

"Very few universities have tried to implement all-comers policies in the aftermath of CLS v. Martinez," says French, who has defended student religious groups for more than a decade. "They recognize the fundamental absurdity of an all-comers policy."

More than a dozen religious groups have determined they cannot or will not comply with Vanderbilt's stance, which prompted members of the Congressional Prayer Caucus to complain to school officials that religious student groups are being targeted. They cited a now-unrecognized campus group that was told it must remove a requirement that its leaders have a personal commitment to Jesus.

"Belief-based or status-based requirements are inconsistent with our nondiscrimination policy," said Vanderbilt spokeswoman Beth Fortune when asked about that group. She also insisted the policy "does not target specific student groups."

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship senior vice president Jim Lundgren says his organization is currently helping several chapters beyond Vanderbilt and Buffalo that are facing questions about their policies. IVCF officials say that allowing chapters to determine how to pick their leaders helps maintain their values. "We just want to have a place on college campuses and allow our perspective to be there in the kind of mix of ideas and beliefs," says Lundgren. "We think that's part of what a great college education is about."



## Former missionary to head CRC Back-to-God ministries

PALOS HEIGHTS, Illinois (CRCNA) – Former missionary Rev. Kurt Selles will be the new director of the Christian Reformed Church's Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI). He was appointed by the denomination's board of trustees. He will fill the vacancy left by Rev. Robert Heerspink, BTGMI's former director who died last year of pancreatic cancer.

Selles served for 19 years with Christian Reformed World Missions. He taught in universities in Taiwan and China and directed the Calvin College Semester-in-China program. Selles currently teaches missions and serves as the director of the Global Center at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala.

Pending ratification by Synod 2012, it is anticipated that Selles will begin work as BTGMI director in early August.

"Kurt's service on the mission field and his more recent involvement in academia, have shaped his ministry and uniquely qualifies him for leadership in the global media outreach at Back to God Ministries. We look forward to serving with him," said Peter Borgdorff, deputy executive director for CRCNA.

After graduating from Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich., Selles received a PhD from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. He then taught on the mission field, directed the Calvin College program and is now serving at Beeson.

## Servant leader

"What impresses me most about Kurt is his attitude of servant leadership. His career as an ordained minister, missionary, teacher and administrator has been dedicated to bringing the Good News of God's Kingdom to the world," said Rev. Bruce Persenaire, BTGMI board president and member of the search committee for the new director.

Selles, who has authored journal articles and books on missions, says he looks forward to serving with the BTGMI staff. "I'm very humbled and honoured to have the opportunity to work with the BTGMI team to proclaim the Gospel and to strengthen churches around the world," he said. "I pray that God will use the ministry experience I bring from North America and around the world to serve the BTGMI team in expanding the task of sharing Jesus' story and love."

Selles says his prayer is "that together we'll be able to continue and strengthen the important ministries of BTGMI and be at the leading edge of using developing technologies and new opportunities to proclaim the love of Jesus."

Selles and his wife, Vicki, have three children: a daughter living in Birmingham, a son at Calvin College and a daughter who is in her second year of high school.

## U.S.: Two-year-old Supreme Court decision is agitating campus religious groups

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (RNS) – Two years ago the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a Christian student group could be recognized at the University of California's Hastings College of the Law only if it accepted non-Christians and gays as potential leaders. The 5-4 decision in *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez* was primarily aimed at public colleges and universities, but that decision is now causing strife across U.S. campuses of all kinds.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) says that 41 of its campus chapters have faced challenges since the Supreme Court decision. Many have been resolved, but the IVCF chapter at the State University of New York at Buffalo plans to appeal its loss of official recognition for asking a gay student leader to resign when he would not accept its belief statement.

Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., a private university, has said that some religious groups won't be officially recognized if they require certain beliefs of members and leaders, or do not allow all members to compete for leadership roles. In defending its decision, Vanderbilt is citing the 2010 Supreme Court ruling.

David French, senior counsel with the American Center for Law and Justice, says there has been an increase in challenges to faith-based campus activity since the 2010 ruling. He says the "all-comers policies" for religious groups, such as Vanderbilt's, are unfair as long as sororities or all-male glee clubs can discriminate based on gender.



## News

## Christian leaders 'not surprised' by Obama embrace of gay marriage

Marian Van Til, with files from Christian Post, ABC, LifeSiteNews

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. President Barack Obama's announcement on May 9 that he approves of same-sex marriage has created a stir among Christian leaders in the U.S. The pro and con lines among Christians are drawn between evangelicals, orthodox Catholics and leaders of other traditionally biblical churches and organizations on the one hand, and mainline Protestants and unorthodox Catholics on the other.

Tony Perkins, president of the conservative Family Research Council, called Obama's remarks "disappointing but not surprising." But at least the President is now being honest, Perkins noted. As early as 1996 Obama expressed support for gay "marriage," Perkins noted. But he backed off that support when he began to run for public office in Illinois. This "finally brings his words in sync with his actions. From opposing state marriage amendments to refusing to defend the federal Defense of Marriage Act [which was passed under President Clinton] to giving taxpayer funded marriage benefits to same-sex couples, the President has undermined the spirit if not the letter of the law."

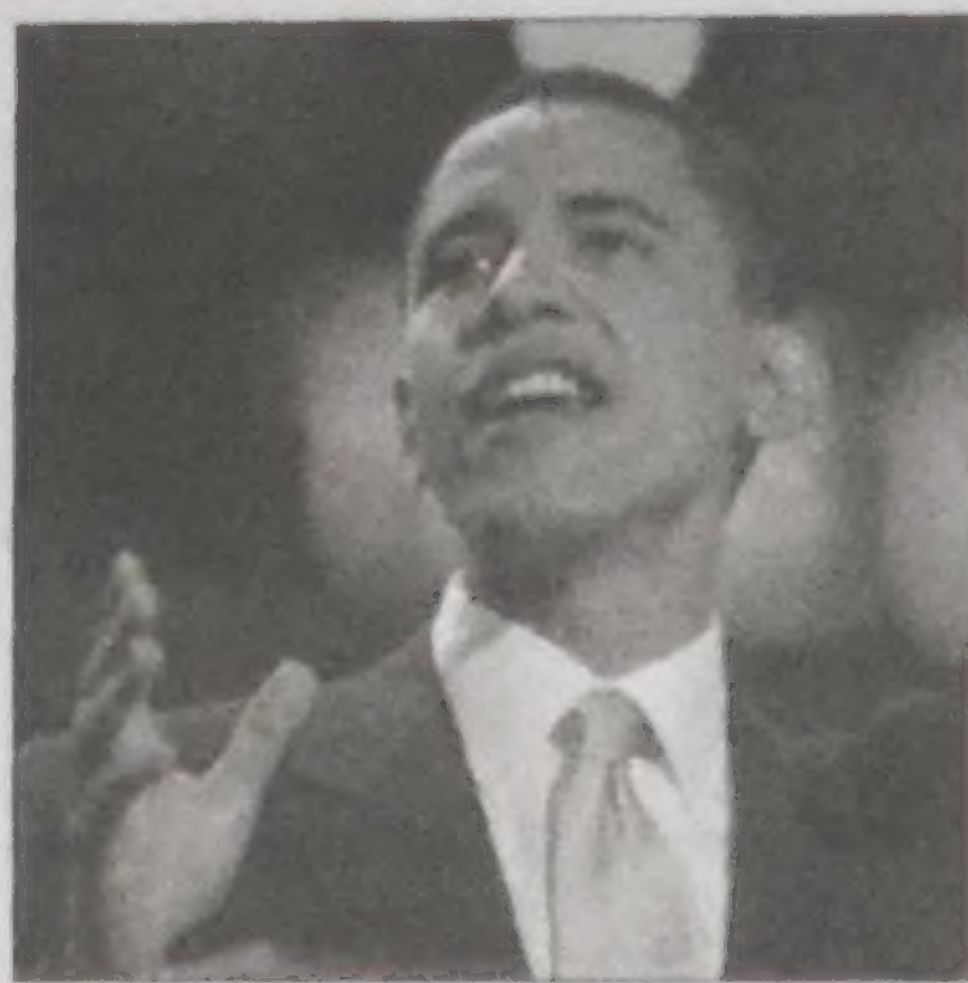
Perkins thinks that Obama "has provided a clear contrast between him and his challenger Mitt Romney. Romney, who has signed a pledge to support a marriage protection amendment to the U.S. Constitution, may have been handed the key to social conservative support by President Obama," asserted Perkins.

Romney himself said, "I have the same view on marriage that I had when I was governor [of Massachusetts] and that I've expressed many times. I believe marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman." The individual states can "make decisions with regards to domestic partnership benefits, such as hospital visitation rights," but "marriage itself is a relationship between a man and a woman."

### A political mistake?

Maggie Gallagher, co-founder of the National Organization for Marriage (NOM), echoed Perkins. "On the one hand, morally this is good because lying to the American people is always wrong. President Obama has come clean that he is for gay marriage."

Gallagher continued, "Politically, we welcome this. We think it's a huge mistake. President Obama is choosing the money over the voters the day after 61 percent of North



Carolinians in a key swing state demonstrated they oppose gay marriage [by voting in support of a state constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman]. North Carolina is now the 30th out of the 50 states that has passed such an amendment.

Among orthodox Roman Catholics, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, who is president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, described Obama's announcement as "deeply saddening." The President is "undermining the very cornerstone of society by supporting gay 'marriage,'" said Dolan. He noted that Obama's previous presidential actions regarding marriage "erode or ignore the unique meaning of marriage." Dolan called for prayer, and efforts to "promote and protect marriage" in order to "serve the true good of all persons."

Catholic layperson Matt Smith, president of Catholic Advocate, pointed out that President Obama's open stance on same-sex marriage goes directly against Catholic Church teachings, which Obama has been at odds with in recent months with his push for religious-based employers to provide insurance that allows for contraception coverage, including abortifacients.

"Once again, the President is spending time advancing an anti-Catholic agenda," Smith asserted. "Marriage was created long before any government came into existence. It is a settled issue in the eyes of the Catholic Church and should not be redefined."

### More reactions

Albert Mohler, the Reformed-leaning president of the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Ky., called Obama's public support of gay "marriage" a "historic and tragic milestone." A sitting president of the United States "has now called for a transformation of civilization's central institution," noted Mohler. "And yet, no observer of this President could be surprised. The arrival of this announcement was only a matter of time."

John Piper, the prolific writer and Reformed Baptist pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minn., called gay "marriage" a "tragic oxymo-

ron." In response to President Obama's announcement Piper's Desiring God ministry posted (online) an excerpt from a 2011 post written by Piper. "In God's eyes, there simply is no such thing as so-called gay marriage. It does not exist. It cannot be made to exist," said Piper.

Meanwhile, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, United Methodist and other mainline Protestant leaders — whose churches already accept either the "blessing" or "marriage" of same-sex couples, and who have ordained clergy who are homosexual or lesbian — support Obama's views. They see rejecting gay marriage as an issue of simple discrimination.

### Christ would approve?

Obama insisted that he and his wife, Michelle, support their position based on their faith. "You know, when we think about our faith, the thing at root that we think about is, not only Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf, but it's also the Golden Rule," he told his ABC News interviewer.

Dr. C. Welton Gaddy from the Interfaith Alliance praised Obama for his support of same-sex marriage.

"President Obama's affirmation of the right to same gender marriage is an important and historic moment in the life of the nation," said Gaddy. "His statement shows that he understands his role is to protect Constitutional principles over sectarian ideology. While I appreciate that the president thinks his position is consistent with his faith — a belief I have long held — it is the Constitution, not his religion that should form the basis of his position."

Commentators across the political spectrum have noted that Obama's sudden announcement came after U.S. Vice President Joe Biden's unbridled comments in support of gay marriage — forcing the President's hand. Traditional Values Coalition (TVC) President Andrea Lafferty put it bluntly. "This isn't exactly a bold move by the president. Forced by Joe Biden's big mouth, Obama had no choice left but to publicly embrace an agenda he has privately promoted for years."

Commentators also noted that the President's political base on the left strongly supports gay rights, and that most homosexuals and lesbians voted for him in 2008 and will again. The *Washington Post* also pointed out that "one in six of Obama's top campaign bundlers [people who raise financial support] are gay." It has suddenly become "immeasurably easier" to raise that support, noted one of those bundlers. >

## Canadians' religious freedom in danger, bishops warn

OTTAWA (CNA/EWTN News) — Freedom of religion and conscience are in danger of disappearing from Canadian society, the country's Roman Catholic bishops warned earlier this month.

"In the past decade in Canada there have been several situations that raise the question whether our right to freedom of conscience and religion is everywhere respected," the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops observed in a pastoral letter.

"At times, believers are being legally compelled to exercise their profession without reference to their religious or moral convictions, and even in opposition to them," said the bishops. They pointed to the dangers of "radical secularism" and an "aggressive" relativism that opposes all claims of truth.

The bishops also highlighted the anti-religious nature of some of Canada's "anti-discrimination" laws, and the tendency of advocacy groups to use provincial Human Rights Tribunals to promote a radical agenda and block believers from speaking and acting freely. These "acrimonious procedures," they said, "would be better replaced by a civilized and respectful debate" that offers "a voice

in the public forum to religious believers. If that voice is suppressed in any way, believers should view this as a restriction on their right to freedom of religion, one which should be forcefully challenged."

Billed as a "pressing appeal" to people of all religions and outlooks, the "Pastoral Letter on Freedom of Conscience and Religion" cites the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which acknowledges "freedom of conscience and religion" as a fundamental liberty. The bishops also cited the Second Vatican Council's document on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*. It declares that a person should not be "forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits."

Conference president Archbishop Richard W. Smith of Edmonton asserted that all Canadians have a shared interest in "the right of religion to be active in the public square." All Canadians should seek "healthy church-state relations" that distinguish between the state and the church without pushing the church out of public life, said Archbishop Smith. Canada must safeguard the right of conscientious objection, especially in areas "linked to the

dignity of human life and the family."

In some provinces these rights have already been compromised or lost. For example, "some pharmacists are being threatened by being forced to have to fill prescriptions for contraceptives or the 'morning after' pill; and marriage commissioners in British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Saskatchewan must now perform same-sex marriages or resign." Christians have both a right and a duty to stand against laws that violate the moral order.

The bishops affirmed parents' right "to educate their children in their religious convictions and to choose the schools which provide that formation." The state, meanwhile, "has the obligation to protect this right ... and to create a suitable environment where it can be enjoyed."

In the course of upholding their principles, believers may also be forced to suffer for them. Believers who defy a state's unjust decree "must be prepared to suffer the consequences that result from fidelity to Christ." If they are not given an accommodation or reprieve, they should receive "the effective solidarity and prayerful support of their religious communities. The Church's vitality has often been nourished by persecution. Our era is no exception," said the bishops. >



## Columns

## Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



I cordially dislike billboards. I have a secret desire to rent a billboard and get someone to paint a *trompe d'oeil* of what the view would be like without the sign as my protest.

I also dislike evangelism or "religious advertising" on roadsides. REPENT OR DIE and JESUS LOVES YOU signs actually make me cringe. But I have found a billboard that I think is more a call to thought than a pronouncement. It is a local sign questioning motorists to think about abortion.



This billboard seems more a call to thought than a pronouncement.

In a discussion with a friend about anti-abortion advertising, I mentioned the Christian Reformed Church's *Contemporary Testimony* as a statement of a consistently Christian pro-life stance.

## Article 12.

No matter what our age, or race, or color,  
we are the human family together,  
for the Creator made us all.  
Since life is his gift,  
we foster the well-being of others,  
protecting the unborn and helpless from harm.

## Article 46.

We serve Christ by thankfully receiving our life  
as a gift from his hand.  
We protest and resist  
all abuse and harm of this gift  
by abortion, pollution, gluttony,  
addiction and all foolish risks.

I'm quite sure that almost all our church members could say these words in good conscience. The reason I admire the *Contemporary Testimony* so much is that it puts abortion in a context of race, age, color, pollution, gluttony, addiction and foolish risks.

Let's think a bit more about this. If we look at being consistently pro-life, might the Christian community be in the forefront of demanding a different type of hockey than ours in which concussions and other injuries continue despite lots of talk? Might Christian communities pray for athletes injured in extreme sports while at the same time proclaiming loudly that taking "foolish risks" on mountain bikes, skis or "quads" is as high on our agenda as is our opposition to dangerous activities like smoking? Might anti-abortion activists in our churches also speak with members who insist on skiing or snowmobiling in dangerous conditions? Might "pro-life" mean defending the health and community existence of First Nations peoples threatened by development projects without their full consent?

## Other opportunities to be pro-life

At a recent church council meeting we recently addressed creation-care and affirmed the approach taken by the Christian Reformed Church's Creation Care committee, thus taking a "pro-life" stance. To be pro-life is to oppose pollution and the destruction of human individual and social lives. Enbridge pipeline debates need to be conducted in such a pro-life context, rather than a narrow economic one.

## Consistently pro-life

Recently my wife and I attended a speech by Vancouver's Gabor Maté, who is perhaps the world's best authority on addiction and relates addictions in the downtown East Side of Vancouver (which addictions often result in death by accident or suicide) to childhood trauma or abuse. Two of our deacons worked on a committee about care for our aged population in Smithers, hoping to address the neglect and abuse of seniors. Others work hard through projects like the Good Food Box – a local initiative – or support farmers' markets and sustainable agriculture to provide healthy fruits and vegetables (from which you don't get fat, or develop diabetes as you might from too many empty carbohydrates).

Since its beginning Christ's church has been theoretically pro-life, but not in a sense of belonging to an organization of that name. Actually, if I had to choose a label, I'd say I'm pro-Creator pro-Redeemer or even pro-Creation, rather than pro-life.

After reviewing the Torah in Deuteronomy, with its di-

rections on everything from ritual cleanliness to wildlife conservation, from regulations about marriage to sanitation, read God's challenge anew: "This day I call heaven and earth as witness against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life ..." (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

I hope to experience more and more of what Christ proclaims: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10 – KJV). *L'chaim.*

\* *Trompe l'oeil*, French for "deceive the eye," is an art technique involving extremely realistic imagery in order to create the optical illusion that the depicted objects appear in three dimensions.

Curt Gesch (cgesch63@gmail.com) lives in Quick, B.C., where he has a thriving herd of six cows and a herdsman (Betsey) to whom he has been married a long, satisfying time.

## Gathering Light

Emily Wierenga



## The boy who wanted to become superman (so he could save his mommy)



Their beds are ready. I bought them blankets, the fuzzy kind, the kind that make you feel like you're being hugged while you sleep. And I bought one for Aiden, because he'll notice, and I need to be extra careful about that kind of thing right now. About the way he sees, with his old-soul eyes.

Trent will be picking them up in an hour and then it's a two hour ride to Neerlandia and I can't stop thinking about the day they first came here, over a month ago. Holding each other's hands and looking so very alone.

It's been one of those weeks of wrestling with the angels. Of working out on the elliptical while listening to Hillsong and weeping, and speaking to a God who is more in love with us than I ever imagined. Praying one night for these little ones coming, and the next night for my boys and wondering if we are doing the right thing.

And then I saw it.

An open-roofed fortress, around us, and Trent and I holding up our boys, and our boys holding up Jimmy and Caleb, and Jimmy and Caleb holding onto the hands of God. So we're forming this staircase to heaven, one step at a time.

A friend wrote this to me, today: "I'm so happy for your book (congratulations!!) and the success of your art, but truly, I think your best work is still ahead of you."

I can't explain the love I feel for them, these boys who aren't my own. I feel like the shepherd who's risking the lives of his 99 sheep so he can find the one (or two in our case) and trusting, trusting, God will watch out for the rest of the flock while we bring the others home.

\*\*\*

They've been here a few days, now, these foster boys, and it doesn't matter how many hugs I give him. How many times I tell him he's handsome in that white sweater – the one he wore to impress the neighbor girl even though he's only four – how many home-canned peaches I serve him, nor stories I read.

Come night time, it's his mother he needs, and all I can do is lie beside him and put my hand on his back and feel his heart pulling at his skin.

It's only been three days and I know the first while is the hardest, like the three months after bringing home a newborn who feels like a stranger demanding your life. And then one day you wake up and he's become family.

This morning they felt like strangers, these toe-headed Filipino boys, the tall one who cried when he lost the stick he'd buried in the snow outside, who hunts tigers in the woods and wants to be superman when he grows up.

And the short stout one who is Calvin from Calvin and Hobbes. Sticking hands in toilets in guinea pig cage in porridge in baby Kasher's mouth and laughing like the way trees lose their leaves in fall, all colourful and free.

Tonight I looked around, and they'd become family.

We pray a lot right now, inside and out. We're teaching the boys how to pray, too, and they do it over snacks and dessert and sometimes for their mommy.

And we're re-learning faith right now, the way it's kind of a desperate plea when no one's listening and you're wading through

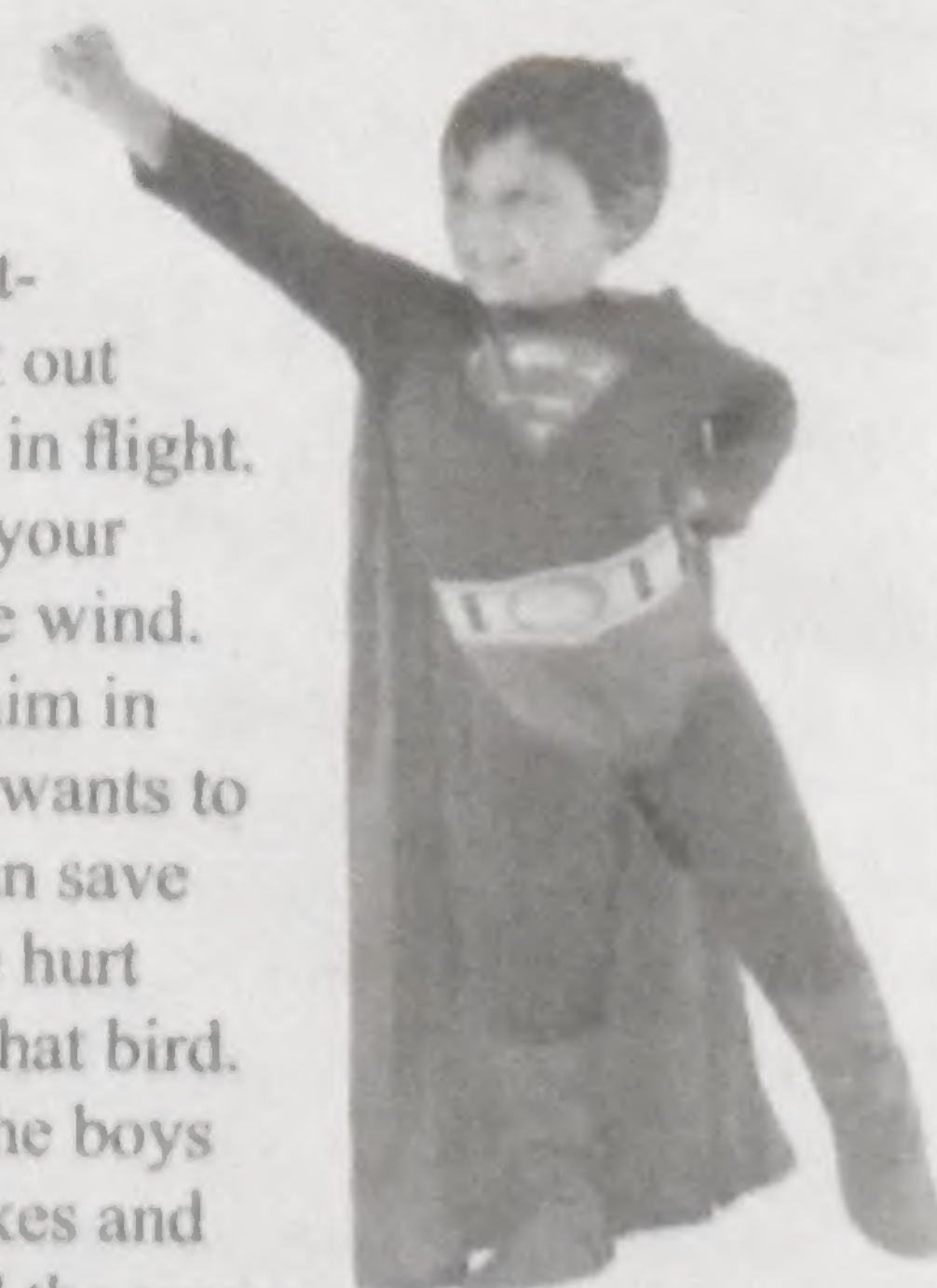
toys and dishes needing to be put away and the boys half-dressed and fighting over toys and you look out the window and see a bird in flight.

And that bird becomes your prayer. The way it rides the wind.

And so, as I lie beside him in the dark, this tall boy who wants to become superman so he can save his mommy from all of the hurt she's feeling, I remember that bird. And I remember the way the boys couldn't stop eating pancakes and strawberries that night, and the way they crowded around "Uncle Trent" after bath for their Bible story, all limbs in lap, and it becomes my prayer.

All of it.

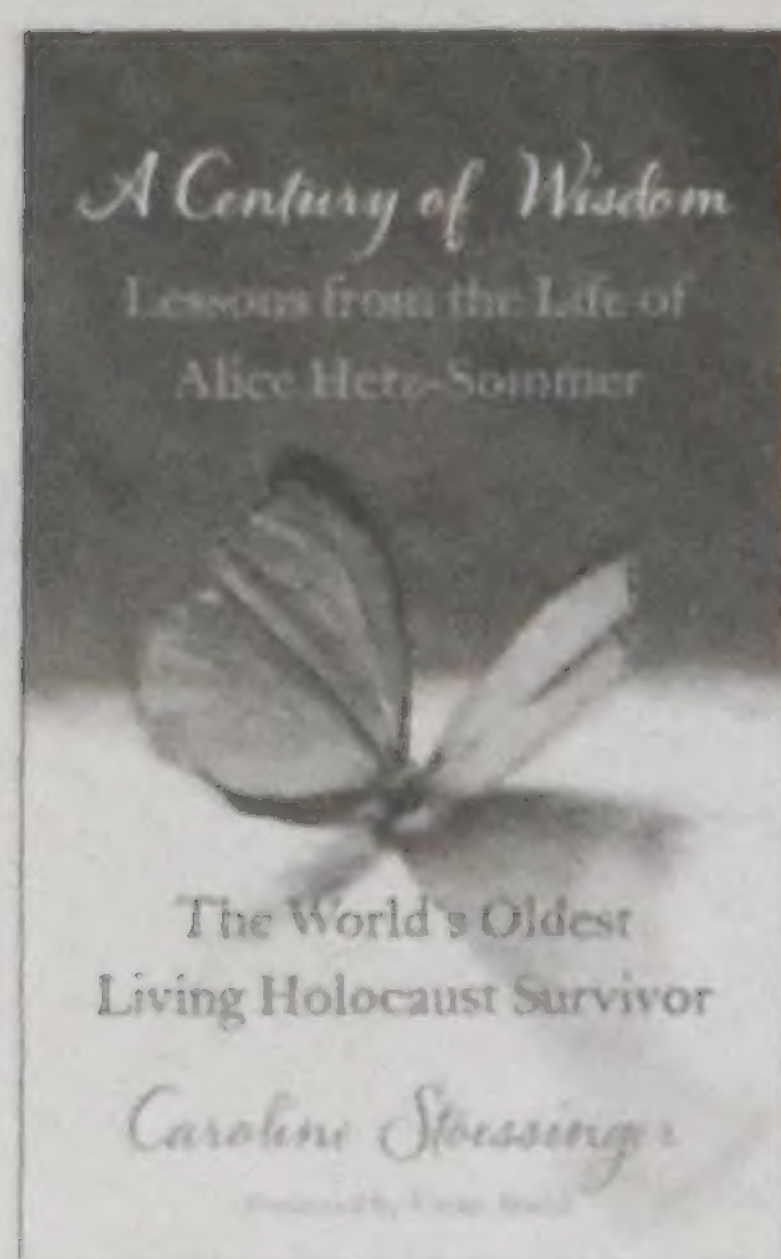
That this boy will know the fullness of this love and that it will become his mother, here in the dark.



Emily Wierenga is an author, artist, and mother who lives in Neerlandia, Alta. She and her husband are currently taking care of four boys under the age of four – two of them not their own. Will you consider praying for them? (Thank you) See [emilywierenga.com](http://emilywierenga.com) for more.



## Reviews



**A Century of Wisdom: Lessons from the Life of Alice Herz-Sommer, The World's Oldest Living Holocaust Survivor**  
by Caroline Stoessinger  
Spiegel and Grau (2012)

But that was before the Nazis arrived in Prague with their hate propaganda and reign of terror. Though Alice's family urged her to emigrate to Palestine along with them, she chose to remain in Prague with her husband and son, in order to care for her aging mother. Alice could never have imagined that her mother would be one of the first to be sent to Theresienstadt.

Stoessinger explains the diabolical nature of the concentration camp: "Theresienstadt was no ordinary concentration camp. From the outside it looked like a very crowded small city where thousands rushed around and music often could be heard: it was Hitler's propaganda machine at work. The Fuhrer had touted Theresienstadt as the place where distinguished Jewish musicians, writers, artists and the elderly would be protected from the war. The truth was that the camp was a heavily guarded ghetto, a transit station to Auschwitz and other Nazi killing fields throughout Eastern Europe. Inside the walls, the gifted and the intelligentsia from Czechoslovakia, Austria, Holland, Denmark and Germany suffered from constant hunger, cold, infectious disease, torture and death" (xvi-xvii).

On July 3, 1943, Alice, her son Rafi and her husband Leopold received their summons to go to the collection center for deportation to Theresienstadt. Alice didn't give in to despair because, in early 1942, the Prague Jewish Council had told her about concerts

## Book recounts life of world's oldest living Holocaust survivor

Sonya Vanderveen Feddema

Alice Herz-Sommer has witnessed more than a century of change. At 108 years of age, she is the world's oldest Holocaust survivor, as well as the world's oldest concert pianist. Born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, on Nov. 26, 1903, Alice spent her early years immersed in the city's lively music scene, her middle years in Prague's occupation by the Nazis and her internment in Theresienstadt, and her later years in both the new state of Israel and England, where she still resides.

Before the onslaught of WWII, Alice's future as a distinguished concert pianist seemed assured. Her mother, a highly educated woman, associated with famous artists and writers, including Gustav Mahler, Rainer Maria Rilke, Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig and Franz Kafka. Consequently, Alice was also influenced by these eminent people. In time, Alice became a frequently-featured piano soloist with the Czech Philharmonic. She also completed several recordings which garnered exemplary reviews.

performed in Theresienstadt for fellow prisoners. At the time, Alice thought to herself, "If we can play concerts, how bad can it be?" (24)

She would soon find out what it was like to have no country and no name, only a deportation number.

Though the musicians in the camp first surreptitiously organized musical activities, the Nazis soon ordered them to perform more frequently. Stoessinger explains: "The Nazis understood that adding musical and artistic events to their spa setting could be a huge publicity stunt to prove to the outside world that all was well with the Jews" (96).

At first Alice was allowed to practice one hour a day, and later she was granted more time. From the summer of 1943 till she was liberated along with Rafi and returned to Prague, she performed more than 100 concerts (her husband was deported to Auschwitz and died there).

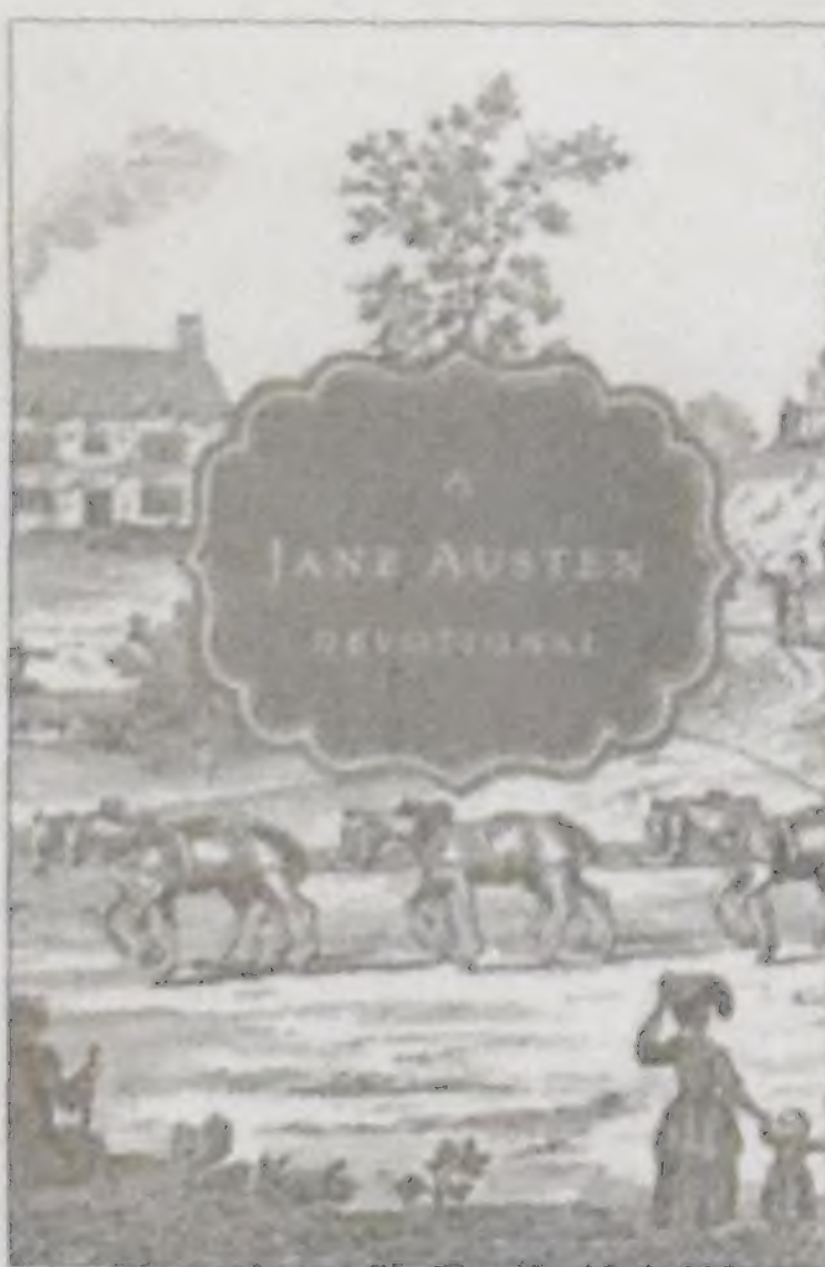
Though the Nazis' reason for allowing the prisoners to perform music was to present a facade to the world, there was something fundamental that they neglected to grasp. Stoessinger explains, "What the Nazis failed to understand was that the power of music to provide comfort and hope to the performers and their audiences was stronger than the

terror of their masters. Every composition that was written in Theresienstadt, and every concert played there, became a moral victory against the enemy. The beauty of their civilization became for many prisoners a shield against despair. Through music, the performers could hold on to their personal identities, while the audiences, transported out of time and place through the music, could for the duration of the performances feel that life was almost normal" (99).



Stoessinger's biography of Alice Herz-Sommer captures the life of a person who was able, with the help of her tremendous love for music, to survive great tragedy. Though the book covers many other aspects of Alice's life, this reader found most enlightening the description of the power of music to enhance the lives of prisoners.

Sonya Vanderveen Feddema (sonyafv55@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.



**A Jane Austen Devotional**  
by Steffany Woolsey  
Thomas Nelson, Inc. (2012)

excerpt and Scripture snippet. It's not typical fan fiction; it's a chance for readers to examine their own behavior alongside the showcased virtues and vices of these beloved characters.

"Like Emma," Woolsey gently prods, "are you guilty of dismissing others as lower than yourself?" (31). Do you have spiritual hypochondria – like the exiled Israelites and a certain character in *Persuasion* – and find misery easier than gratitude? The book's short lessons are solidly Biblical, at times obvious (Following the Golden Rule) but usually thought-provoking (When Teasing is Lying, Coddling Covetousness). The context that Woolsey gives each scene ("here Maria and Julia are complaining about Fanny . . .") can be stylistically jarring. But the best selections are enticing, like hearing a familiar song covered by another artist. You pay attention in a new way.

### 'Strong moral compass'

How relevant are Austen's stories to our lives? "For every question under heaven and every theme throughout time," Woolsey said in interview with CC, "there is an answer in God's Word. I believe that as the daughter of a country pastor, Austen knew this and wrote out of her

## Pride, prejudice and piety

Angela Reitsma Bick

Two hundred years have done wonders for Jane. No need to borrow Bath's waters to revive this small collection; her six books brim with more life than ever. Who could have anticipated the hundreds of online sequels and blogs, or the shelves of Austen knock-offs and spin-offs? Who could have predicted the popularity of a literary mash-up called *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*? She's so entrenched in pop culture that anything "Austen" is bound to find fans. A new publication geared to Christians is no exception.

Let other pens dwell on married life with Darcy. This book takes a more fruitful approach; it's part of a series from Thomas Nelson that pairs British classics with the Bible. A *Jane Austen Devotional*, compiled and written by Steffany Woolsey, contains over a hundred meditations, each with its own Austen



### Jane's prayer

Jane Austen's sister Cassandra saved three of Jane's original prayers. They give a glimpse into her humble, devout character.

*May we now, and on each return of night, consider how the past day has been spent by us, what have been our prevailing thoughts, words and actions during it, and how far we can acquit ourselves of evil. Have we . . . disobeyed the commandments, have we neglected any known duty, or willingly given pain to any human being? Incline our hearts to ask these questions oh! God, and save us from deceiving ourselves by pride or vanity* (Minor Works, 453-54).



experiences and observations." Accordingly, this book's scope goes beyond surface-level subjects like duty (good) and debt (bad).

Infamous and foolish Lydia Bennet, 15, runs off with a man who will not marry her. Even though this sounds more like tabloid fodder than a serious dilemma these days, Woolsey points out that the widespread acceptance of cohabitation doesn't justify its sinfulness. "The choice to live together without the God-blessed benefit of marriage prioritizes selfishness over God," she argues (145). Woolsey also takes a swipe at how TV, movies and "a thousand other forms of entertainment distract us from growing into mature Christians" (149), similar to the heroine's obsession in *Northanger Abbey* with Gothic novels.

Does the average Austen fan recognize religious themes in her work? Maybe not. But Woolsey sees "a strong moral compass" in all of Jane Austen's books, which means that, for her, "it's not a huge leap to connect these with biblical truths found in God's word." Christian fans of Austen will appreciate how Woolsey has made those connections. And this devotional could prompt more Austen addicts to realize that godliness can be gleaned from the well-loved pages of *Pride and Prejudice* more naturally than zombies can be added.

Angela Reitsma Bick is on maternity leave from CC, happily reading through great stacks of books.





## Features

# Intergenerational leadership at the All Ontario Youth Convention

**Natasha Moes**

The All Ontario Youth Convention is an annual May long weekend event for high school students throughout the province. Youth gather for teaching, worship, sports, art, and outreach and leave with a renewed excitement about their faith. For many, it is a highlight of their year and is an event which God faithfully uses to encourage and inspire.

First held in 1975, the AOYC has continued year after year under the leadership of dedicated teams who arrange accommodations, meals, speakers, worship leaders and all the other components of the weekend. For the last several years, this Planning Committee (PC) has included a notable mix of ages, specifically two fairly distinct generational groups, with half the members being under 30 and half being over 50. This group includes several family members: fathers and their daughters, aunt and nephew, all unified by a love for youth.

## An example of cooperative leadership

In a time when there is much to discuss about the apparent absence of young leaders in Christian Reformed churches throughout Ontario, the All Ontario Youth Convention PC has evolved into a unique blend of young and old leaders, resulting in a dynamic that stands out to its members. Krista Hoftyzer, a kinesiology student at Redeemer University, is serving her second year as Events Director on the PC. She remarks, "Whenever I talk to anyone about being on the Convention team, I can never emphasize enough how much of a privilege it is to be part of this group. I have learned so much from the others on this team, and the fact that it is intergenerational has given me the opportunity to interact and work with some very wise people. Their wisdom is something that I admire and look up to." This is the first of several key benefits that intergenerational leadership affords. Young members of the team can access the wealth of wisdom and experience that the older leaders offer and can benefit from their mature perspectives.

Eleanor Kuyvenhoven attended the first Convention in 1975 as a teen. She describes her experience there as being very significant in her faith journey. After several years away, she came on as a leader in 1990 and has attended every year since – 22 years in a row! As a member of the PC, she coordinates Pastoral Care for conventioners and for those in leadership at the AOYC. She stays busy all weekend, leading a team of spiritual directors, supporting a group of teens who pray over the facility before every main session and facilitating several interactive prayer experiences throughout the weekend such as the prayer labyrinth and art den. Eleanor is a much-loved and greatly-respected member of the older generation of leaders on the team. She feels that there is something incredible about having multiple generations represented within the leadership group. She says, "I learn so much

from our younger leaders and my faith grows every time I spend time with this group. I see what the younger team members are capable of and the way God uses their pas-

*Jake Hiemstra (Vice-All) and his daughter Kendra Bakker (Administration) both serve on the AOYC Planning Committee. Granddaughter Dakota Bakker looks forward to attending AOYC 2026*



sion and enthusiasm. As older leaders, we have life experience and can see new things through the lens of our experience. The younger leaders keep our perspective fresh and our faith grows together." The second benefit of intergenerational leadership, then, is the ability of the younger leaders to impart that new perspective and fresh passion every year. This is important not only in the context of youth-focused events, but in any situation where a wide range of ages is represented, such as church congregations. Youth and young adults are often able to offer new and innovative solutions for problems, employing cultural and technological resources in ways that older leaders might not.

## Invited to serve, upheld in service

It was the mutual respect and sharing of perspectives that initially drew me into the AOYC team and still gives me an ever-increasing appreciation for the dynamic that exists within the PC. I spoke at the Convention in 2010 on behalf of CRWRC after spending three months working in Uganda, and through that initial contact, I was very quickly enfolded into the leadership team. I was asked to serve as Hospitality Director for the following Convention. At times it felt like a baptism by fire as I had never attended an entire Convention before and didn't have a frame of reference for understanding how it was run. In spite of this, I knew that I was part of something really unique as I was challenged and supported by each of the team members, especially those who were significantly older than me. Their passion and love for the teens who attended the event as well as their enthusiasm for youth leadership within their own congregations was genuine. Our bi-monthly meetings felt like a family dinner, and the emails and letters of encouragement that I received from the older members of the team still hang on my wall as a reminder of how cared-for and loved I am in this group.

The team is structured in such a way that allows for each younger leader to be mentored by an older leader. Krista Hoftyzer emphasizes the importance of this relationship, noting, "Being mentored by an older PC member has given me confidence as a leader and as part of this team. I know that my mentor will be there to answer any questions I have, to help me out when tough tasks arise, and to give advice and direction in planning for the Convention. Simply put, having a mentor and being encouraged by other members of the team, has made the AOYC experience phenomenal, faith-building, and has strengthened me." This practice of mentoring is the third benefit of intergenerational teams. It allows new leaders to be supported very intentionally by experienced leaders and creates generous opportunities for building trust and sharing wisdom between age groups. Eleanor Kuyvenhoven describes it as "calling out the very best of each person," reflecting on the fact that each individual has a unique strength-set and that the younger generation of leaders has a perspective that is different from that of the older generation. Through these mentoring relationships, every person is challenged to use the best of what God has given in order to support the vision and mission of the group.

As a young leader on this team, I've experienced this "calling out" and have been amazed to see God use my



*The AOYC Planning Committee pictured at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo. Back row: Tim Scholman, Henry Valkenburg, Nathan Kikkert, Jake Hiemstra. Middle row: Natasha Moes, Krista Hoftyzer, and Fraser Kuyvenhoven. Front row: Ray Heeres, Brenda Heeres, Kendra Bakker, Eleanor Kuyvenhoven, Amy Valkenburg, Erika Haveman.*

strengths much more potently than I could have expected. Because my mentors are able to see things in me and my teammates that we cannot see on our own, they are able to direct our leadership gifts in a very effective way. So the fourth benefit of intergenerational leadership is that we frequently find our own strengths multiplied in effectiveness because every individual's gifts are complemented by the others. As such, the PC is an example of Paul's exhortation to the Romans to function as many parts of one body, each part amplifying the contributions of the others.

Jake Hiemstra, Vice-All of the PC and an older member of the team, comments, "With the All Ontario I see how young adults have an opportunity to participate in this event to impact teens on their journey. They aren't afraid to get their hands dirty. Their unbounded energy keeps me energized. Based on this, it saddens me that not many are in major leadership roles in our churches."

## Forward together

Both younger and older leaders are needed in our churches. Similar strengths to those described by PC members could be developed in other leadership bodies within churches and communities if both older and younger people are intentionally recruited for leadership and vision. However, the success of this type of structure is dependent on mutual respect and a willingness to lean on and learn from each other. Every leader must be supported by the people around them, all contributing towards the goal with a common vision.

As this article goes to print, the PC will be wrapping up AOYC 2012 at the Laurier Campus where it began 38 years ago. With a record-breaking number of youth signed up to attend, it is sure to be a memorable event. For more information, including media coverage from this year's event and details about AOYC 2013, visit [al-lontario.com](http://al-lontario.com), the All Ontario Youth Convention page on Facebook, or @AllOntario and #aoyc on Twitter.

*Natasha Moes is a graduate of the University of Waterloo and works in Mississauga. She loves a challenge and, as Hospitality Director, plans to serve pizza to 1000 AOYC attendees in under 10 minutes.*





## Features

# Marcello Araujo: spreading the good news to Jews and Gentiles

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

On Maundy Thursday, I attended a Passover Supper at Covenant Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont., hosted by Marcello Araujo from Chosen People Ministries, which he describes as “a God-given tool to bring the good news of his redemptive work through Yeshua, the Messiah, a message that we spread first to the Jews and also to the Gentiles through art, music, and many different mediums.”

Araujo began the meal by reading from the Messianic Passover Haggadah and said, “The Passover Seder is an ancient ceremonial meal that can be traced back to the Exodus from Egypt. The Seder ceremony is an object lesson: the items on the table and many of the foods eaten help to tell the story of the departure from Egypt. But within the symbolism of the modern Passover Seder, and within the Passover story, there is a message of a greater redemption – a redemption for all mankind found in Jesus the Messiah.”

Although Reformed Christians might differ from Messianic Jewish Christians regarding the prophetic status and role of the contemporary nation of Israel within redemptive history and possibly other theological issues as well, we can rejoice in targeted and fruitful efforts like Araujo’s to evangelize Jewish people. My sharing in a Passover Supper with Araujo and members of my congregation was a celebration of our shared inheritance in Christ: “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him” (Romans 10:12).

Recently, I interviewed Araujo to learn about how God led him to faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

Describe the family and faith into which you were born.



Growing up Jewish in the 99 percent Roman Catholic country of Ecuador presented some interesting challenges. It was a mixed bag of pleasantries, as well as many unpalatable periods. We had a beautiful synagogue in Quito, which served as the center of a close, vibrant, and fun Jewish community. It was rich with culture and traditions,

a place to interchange new ideas, converse in the rich Ladino language (also known as Judeo-Spanish) and celebrate Jewish life and stories. As children we attended Hebrew school, but it was short-lived as my father passed away. We attended services only on special occasions, and eventually drifted away.

When I attended high school, I became aware of the strong anti-Semitic attitude of the population at large. We tried to be as inconspicuous as possible. We often heard derogatory epithets and the proverbial accusation that the Jews killed Jesus. Also, during that time, I received a small book entitled *The Communist Manifesto*.

Why did you become a Marxist and a political activist?

Political upheaval, as well as lack of social justice in Ecuador, led youth of every social stratum to become politically active, demanding change from the governing body, change that would lead to equality and an egalitarian society devoid of the bourgeoisie. Karl Marx wrote, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”

What did you hope to achieve by embracing Marxism? How did you try to attain your goals?

Later on, as I read Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*, it confirmed that the only means to change societies around the world was to engage in civil disobedience. As the governing bodies protected only the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, that meant that the social contract had been effectively broken. Therefore, we the people must take action, rebel, and bring change. We must take up arms and reclaim our freedom, which would come only by means of an armed struggle.

How did God lead you to faith in Jesus as the Messiah?

Political persecution in Ecuador was systematic and fierce. Many people were assassinated and many disappeared. It was time to leave in order to preserve life and keep the struggle alive. My older brother had already immigrated to Canada, and, through his sponsorship, I was able to leave my home country. However, the flame of social injustice and the desire for change burned deep in my heart. I saw the arts as the best medium to accomplish change, so I studied arts and political science.

During this period, I met a few people who believed in God and called themselves Christians. However, when confronted with a few tough questions, they crumbled. That only confirmed for me that religion did not have any strong basis to exist, and, if there was the possibility that God existed, he was too far removed and had no desire to bother with humans. Then I met Ken, a Gentile follower of Jesus, who in plain words told me, “You are a sinner and you need to be cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.” It not only sounded ridiculously laughable, but it prompted a reaction from within my lost Jewishness. I responded, “Blood does not cleanse; it stains. I am Jewish. I do not sin.”

Eventually, because of Ken’s powerful witness combined with my research of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), I discovered that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was real, but perhaps not personal. During one of our arguments, Ken quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures something that profoundly challenged my way of thinking: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles

7:14). The verse speaks of healing, forgiveness, restoration, and **FREEDOM**. It was not enough for me, though. Something was missing. It was just a promise from a far-removed entity, if it even existed.

Ken also quoted from the second covenant (the New Testament), which I eventually bought and read. I discovered Yeshua’s life, his work, and his ministry. He was the promised Messiah. But I, a Jew, could not and would not follow him. Ken challenged me to follow Jesus. I said that I didn’t want to be the only Jew in the whole world that would believe and follow Jesus as the Messiah. It was then that he said something shocking: “I have a Jewish friend that believes in Jesus.” Then he made a phone call. When the person answered, Ken said to me, “You talk.” I did. The person invited me to a Friday night Bible study. Ken took me there. As they finished the Jewish liturgy, the person leading the Bible study asked if there was someone there who needed prayer. Ken pointed to me and said: “I need prayer for my friend who is not saved.” I felt embarrassed and wanted to bolt out of there.

Later on, the leader challenged me to study the Bible with her for four weeks. While reading the gospel of John, the fourth chapter, the story in which Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that he is the living water, we came to the following passage: “Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.’” Right then and there I knew that Jesus, Yeshua, was my personal Messiah and Redeemer. I prayed the sinner’s prayer. I had wanted to change the world through revolutions, not knowing that God wanted me to be part of his world-changing army by sharing his love and coming kingdom.

What is your current position at Chosen People Ministries ([cpmcanada.ca](http://cpmcanada.ca))?

My desire to change the world through love and compassion for the lost sheep of Israel is the same desire of the prophets of old. It is God’s desire. We have become the modern watchmen who must herald the good news to the lost sheep of Israel and the rest of the world. I am a watchman, who brings the good news of the kingdom of

God to the lost sheep of the house of Israel in Hamilton, Ont. I am also in the process of planting a congregation in Hamilton by teaching people in the church to love the Jewish people and Israel, and by teaching the entire Bible from a Jewish perspective.

How would you advise Christians to effectively share the gospel with Jewish people?

If you love God, and if you take seriously Jesus’ command to go out to the world and make disciples, then you will seriously and lovingly share God’s love with the Jew first and also the Gentile. Love the Jews to life by sharing Yeshua’s love with them.



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema ([sonyavf55@hotmail.com](mailto:sonyavf55@hotmail.com)) is a freelance writer living in St. Catharines, Ont.



The Seder table setting.



## Features

## Ready

Stanley Groothof

By all appearances, they could not have been more unprepared. In Mark 6 the disciples are sent by Jesus to local villages to preach, drive out demons and heal people. In short, they are to begin bearing witness to Jesus – who he is and what he does.

Did I mention we're only in Mark 6?

The disciples are sent out absolutely clueless about Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection – those events haven't happened yet. (Even when Jesus predicts that he will die and rise again, the disciples cannot comprehend what he is saying.) You'd think that knowing about Jesus' sacrificial death would be an important thing to know and talk about if you're going to bear witness to him. The disciples are also clueless about Jesus' ascension and the pouring out of his Holy Spirit – two more events that haven't happened yet. And it goes without saying that the disciples are clueless about Trinitarian theology and justification by faith – perhaps not terms we'd use around people who are meeting Jesus for the very first time, but nevertheless part of a good foundation when talking about Jesus.

Adding to the disciples' lack of knowledge and experience are Jesus' words to them after he calms a storm on the Sea of Galilee: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" All in all, it would appear that there's not a group so unprepared and under-qualified to share the Gospel than the 12 disciples! Yet that's precisely what Jesus sends them out to do.

We should note, however, that the disciples *do* have one qualification: they have been with Jesus. They have begun to be influenced by his presence and his work.

Perhaps when we feel inadequate for the task of telling people about our faith, we are putting unrealistic expectations upon ourselves. Maybe we are putting educational or experiential prerequisites on ourselves that Jesus never intended. Even though they didn't comprehend the whole picture, it was enough for the disciples to begin imitating Jesus and talking about him right where they were at. As believers on this side of the crucifixion and resurrection, how much more qualified we must be to do the same! As Brian McLaren titles one of his books, we're more ready than we realize!

By this point, I might have convinced your mind that you're qualified to share Jesus, but maybe your mouth, hands, feet and heart still don't feel up to the task. I'm really encouraged when James R. Edwards writes in his book *The Gospel According to Mark* about how feeling ill-prepared in one way can actually be a *good* thing:

"Uncomprehending and ill-prepared [first century] disciples ... typify believers in every age and place who are sent out by the Lord of the harvest. No matter how much exegesis, theology, and counselling one has studied, one is never 'prepared for ministry!' A genuine call to ministry always calls us to that for which we are not adequately prepared. It is only in awareness of such that the Christian experiences the presence and promise of Jesus Christ, and learns to depend not on human capabilities but on the One who calls." (p.183).

Stanley Groothof is the pastor of Telkwa Christian Reformed Church in Telkwa, B.C.



Within Reach: Tongues of Fire by Melani Pyke. Check out her inspirational oil and acrylic paintings at [melpyke.com](http://melpyke.com)

## Veni Creator Spiritus

Pentecost 2012

Come!

Spirit brooding power  
above the waters  
glacial majesty  
facing our deep  
chaotic sea  
grey, green, or sepia  
come hover over us  
with power reflectively  
and hesitant hope.

Lead us gently  
drag us gruffly  
helping us heavenward  
even if unwillingly  
that we may uncover  
the integral mystery  
half-hidden, half-lost  
but shining, mystically  
thoughtfully  
frightfully  
and costly.

Spirit from above  
yet also from under  
from past and future  
and all the wonder  
of stars and planets  
cosmic and microcosmic  
dynamic dimensions  
laws like granite  
for algae and tadpoles  
and for the dot of our eyes  
gazing while a kite flies  
or acknowledging sunsets  
come! help us truly see  
in each event another  
unsigned sign of wonder:  
glimpses that trace  
your sun and thunder  
and our victories  
or atrocities.

Why lead us  
through the desert  
where sandy thorns  
have torn us?  
Our aches, mistakes  
cannot be grasped  
at first nor last.

Lord, you are the mystery  
we see or long to see  
in events, times, breezes  
people, places  
yes, within the faces  
of sisters and brothers  
yet partially only  
for shadows hide  
your presence -  
yet never wholly  
for we always feel

that we should kneel  
when you are near  
as the Other  
who is Holy.

Is this the unsought  
mystery at once  
revealed, concealed?

Perhaps this is the place  
for meeting each other  
imperfectly but gifted by  
the Spirit's woven lace  
as if embroidered by  
a loving mother  
who dresses a child  
with care and elation  
for a celebration  
of hesitant hope.

Creative Spirit!  
what other answer  
could our heart  
begin to stutter  
when we trace  
your generating  
resonance  
and presence?

Come!  
Spirit of Light  
within the dark world  
of each heart  
and make your mark  
a sign of hesitant hope  
that we may find  
beyond all sorrow  
without mistake  
Christ's love toward

this world inclined.

Frank Sawyer



Hesitant Hope by Hungarian artist Zoltan Bertha. The original painting is on loan to the Sarospatak Theological Academy

Frank Sawyer ([fsawyer777@gmail.com](mailto:fsawyer777@gmail.com)) was born in B.C. and studied at Calvin College and in the Netherlands where he became a pastor. Since 1982 he has served with Christian Reformed World Missions, first in Latin America and then in Hungary, where he teaches philosophy and ethics at Sarospatak Seminary.





## Columns

From the 11th  
Province

Marian Van Til



Last month I wrote about why we and the modern church still urgently need to be guided by the “sound doctrine” that St. Paul knew was essential to the church 2000 years ago.

Historically, the Calvinist Reformed tradition has been doctrinally strong. John Calvin was a master Bible interpreter and understood the intricate intertwining of biblical teaching (doctrine) with faith and life. Calvin had a keen intellect. It was paired with a profound, steadfast faith that richly sustained him through his difficult life. It is no accident that his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* are still, 500 years later, the most insightful and profoundly biblical theological volumes ever written. Nor is it inconsequential that the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the primary doctrinal standard of the Christian Reformed Church, reveals Calvin’s influence, written as it was by two of Calvin’s students.

The catechism is divided into 52 “Lord’s Days.” The Reformers expected that congregations would be systematically taught and deepened in their faith through hearing sermons each Sunday of the year based on the comprehensive biblical truths outlined in the catechism. From its 19th century inception, the CRC, too, knew that every congregation would benefit from such a weekly catechism sermon. But it rarely happens any more. Critics (many of them pastors) have discarded the catechism. In a technological age it’s boring, too intellectual, too doctrinal; irrelevant.

Of all the attitudes and practices that I take issue with in the current CRC (and the list seems to be growing), the diminishing of the importance of the catechism has the most dire consequences – the more when Christian school attendance is also waning. When the catechism is ignored, so too is the best means of system-

## Whither the Heidelberg Catechism?

atically teaching the fundamental truths of the Bible and of laying a solid foundation of true faith, Christ-infused thinking and living.

### Lectionary has drawbacks

Some CRCs have taken to using a lectionary instead of the catechism. A long-time part of Catholic and mainline Protestant liturgy, the lectionary is a three-year cycle of weekly Scripture readings from specific parts of the Old and New testaments. That sounds like a good, organized way to read and preach through the Bible. But I have repeatedly experienced its drawbacks while working as an organist/choir director for years in mainline churches and in a Catholic parish for a year.



Zacharias Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism.

A very short sermon is most often based only on the Gospel reading and is rarely tied in to the other Scripture lessons. Real exegesis is in short supply. Then there are the substantial portions of the Bible that are never read because the lectionary omits them (and many members rarely read the Bible at home). Large swaths of the Old Testament are deleted, perhaps as being irrelevant to modern Christians. The so-called imprecatory Psalms and parts of other Psalms don’t appear either. What do you do

with such distasteful, bloodthirsty stuff except to get rid of it?

Use of the lectionary doesn’t automatically mean a church will take the Bible less seriously. But it makes it easier because the leaders who drew up the lectionary eliminated parts of the Bible which confounded or troubled (or bored) them. And by the time a church or its clergy can, without qualms of conscience, “edit” the parts of the Bible they don’t like, they are past the point of treating the Bible as the inspired Word of God. Such a church is unwilling to listen to God’s voice and accept God as he reveals himself in his Book. That church is remaking God in its own image, and his Word into a mere “guide” that can be applied – or not – as that church, its clergy and individual members see fit.

This is an old story. It is an extension of the theological Modernism that emerged during the 18th century Enlightenment when prominent philosophers concluded that human reason trumps God’s wisdom. By now it has seeped deeply into the fabric of contemporary Christianity in Europe and North America. That’s why it’s more crucial than ever for church members of all ages to thoroughly know

## Artful Eye



Hank Jagt is an artist and sculptor living in Petrolia, Ont. Check out his work at [hankjagt.com](http://hankjagt.com).



### Sanctus

A goldfinch, bright as a grace note, has landed on a branch across the creek that mutters and murmurs to itself as it rushes on, always in a hurry. The *ee oh lay* of a wood thrush echoes from deep in the forest, someplace green. In paintings, the Holy Ghost usually takes the form of a stylized dove, its whiteness a blaze of purity. But what if it’s really a mourning dove, ordinary as daylight in its old coat, nothing you’d ever notice. When he rises from the creek and the light flares behind, his tail is edged in white scallops, shining. And when he opens his beak, isn’t he calling your name, sweet and low, *You, you, you?*



Barbara Crooker is a poet living in Fogelsville, Pa. This poem is reprinted with permission from her book, *More* (C&R Press, 2010). Find out more at [barbaracrooker.com](http://barbaracrooker.com).



The Church of the Holy Spirit in Heidelberg. Here Elector Frederick II ordered the mass to be conducted in German after hearing there the German Language chorale “Es ist das Heil uns kommen her” “Salvation has come to us.” Frederick III later continued the reforms and is credited with commissioning the Heidelberg Catechism. ([heidelbergcatechismproject.com](http://heidelbergcatechismproject.com))

the Bible, to personally study it and to hear it comprehensively preached so it is rightly understood; and then to live it – and at every step giving God glory. Each of us must “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). That ability takes prayerful, concerted effort, on our part and the church’s.

The Heidelberg Catechism is a compendium on biblical faith and the “sound doctrine” that it embodies the historic “five points of Calvinism” because the Bible teaches those points.

Thus, the catechism is an indispensable guide to systematic preaching and teaching. Never fear: I won’t use future columns to expound on the 52 Lord’s Days! But in the next months I do hope to review with you those five points of Calvinism – and to convince you that knowing and believing them are now more important than ever.

Marian Van Til ([mvantil@roadrunner.com](mailto:mvantil@roadrunner.com)) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, NY.



## Features

# A different perspective on Maranatha CRC's counselling ministry

Chris Verra

Ron Rupke's story "Counselling ministry case to be decided by Judicial Code Committee" (CC March 26) repeats many of the misconceptions that exist outside and even inside Belleville Maranatha CRC about the church's controversial counselling ministry.

The breach of confidentiality charge that Rupke discusses, very serious in itself, is only the tip of the iceberg. Classis Quinte's decision to dismiss Rev. John Visser came not just after this finding, but after years of complaints from his congregants. Over 250 families have left Maranatha CRC over the past ten or so years, primarily because of problems associated with Visser and the healing ministry he promotes. The findings of breaches of confidentiality came after many other similar complaints to the Christian Reformed Church head offices and Classis Quinte.

Over the past decade, Maranatha's leadership has discounted concerns brought forward by members regarding the healing ministries. On occasion they have attempted to discredit the complainant, sometimes using private information about the individual gained in the course of counselling. So far they have discredited groups and individuals from the congregation, the Church Visitors, the Assessment Team, the classis and the denomination despite the consistency found among their concerns.

I entered into this fray ten years ago. My concerns dealt with how Maranatha was being lead. Ministry staff had changed the structure of our council from a large group with diverse opinions to a small group of known supporters.

## Unprofessional practices

Every program at Maranatha is intertwined with the healing ministry and every program is "managed" by this small group and particularly our pastor. The focus on the healing ministry seemed to create a dynamic in the church that I and many others find distasteful. A hierarchy was formed that is now reflected in who leads the church today. In order for anyone to play a significant role, they must be willing to submit to counselling of some sort. This could be as simple as a series of intimate discussions with a pastor or as involved as a full blown psychological rebuild using rebirthing techniques, age regression therapy and other methods from the secular



Rev. John Visser in front of Maranatha CRC.

psychologists' tool bag. Some have been held like babies while receiving soothing words on the knee of their counsellor.

Over time, the counselling staff came to know most of us intimately. We had shared with them many of our darkest secrets. Some of us had placed ourselves, heart and soul, into their hands. This proved devastating for some when what was shared in the counselling room was also shared over the dinner table or the consistory table. The damage done by such breaches of trust is amplified when counselling of this sort occurs in a Christian community like ours, where we are called to live as if we are family – and indeed many community members are related through birth or marriage.

Typically, in the secular world, the counsellor, psychoanalyst or psychologist does not maintain close ties with the patient outside of their practice. Even within the practice if the patient grows too attached to their mental health advisor, the advisor would move the client to another practitioner in order that deep attachments do not have an opportunity to form. This is not the case at Maranatha, where deep attachments are considered to be a sign that the process is working and are in fact encouraged. Many of the clients of the healing ministry would seek guidance from their counsellor for many or most of their decisions. The "patient" may even live with the counsellor for a time. This process has, for some, gone on for many years. It is not uncommon at Maranatha for former or current clients to call their counsellor Dad or Mom. These practices have caused deep and lasting damage in many situations.

## Financial matters

On March 5, 2005 John Visser announced from the pulpit that there were financial problems at Essence Communications Ltd. Visser was the president of the company. He announced that low cash flow was making payments on their business loan to the bank impossible and unless something happened within a week or so they would face insolvency. The following week, with Visser's consent, the pulpit was again used to announce a special meeting to raise support for the ailing company. The outpouring of cash was immense. \$584,500 was pledged by the members, many of whom had been through the counselling process. Less than a year later it was discovered that the company was in fact much worse off than the congregation had been led to believe. To make matters worse, it was discovered that Visser had been privately requesting money from members of the congregation and former clients of the healing and restoration ministries, in some cases describing the business as "kingdom work." Approximately two million dollars was lent to the struggling company. Despite these efforts they went bankrupt.

Although there remain many questions about business practices, the primary concern for many is not the issue of the money or how businesses are run but the way in which the money was raised, the healing and restoration ministry that set the stage for this, and the leadership structures set up to protect the positions of those who wish to see these theories and practices replicated in other Christian communities.

The bankruptcy of Essence and the ensuing lawsuit launched by a former client of the healing ministry and investor in the bankrupt business drew attention to how devastating this sort of counselling can be. Once close confidants with the Vissers, the family who launched the suit were characterized as evil from the pulpit and by some staff and council members.

Council and the pastors at Maranatha have refused to submit their counselling ministry to any independent assessment. In answer to the growing outcry for accountability a document was produced in 2009, which was presented as a comprehensive assessment but in truth it was produced by Visser, healing staff and Council without any input from the congregation. The document was endorsed by way of a signature, without any formal investigation, by two secular professionals. There are no indications that the outside professionals exercised biblical discernment in their review or whether they have any expertise in the areas of safe church policies.

## Imbalance of power

Rupke was wrong to say that "initial attempts [by Classis Quinte's assessment team] to bring the parties [within the church] together ... failed because the aggrieved members of the Maranatha church would not consent to the process." Rather, the decision to not proceed was made by the assessment team themselves. They felt it would not be a safe process for the concerned members to partake in. You cannot bring parties together when wide power differentials exist between them, and when those in power are unrepentant and armed with intimate secrets about their accusers. The assessment team concluded that the victims of the ministry could not be assured safety in the restorative practices process.

Furthermore, the team never said that the private information was from "one of the members who was now challenging the practices of Maranatha's healing ministry" as reported in Rupke's article. In fact, the team only referred to private letters and e-mails that were shared with them. It is significant that these private documents were not just loose sheets in a file folder. According to the team, the evidence was contained in printed and bound volumes. This raises questions about who printed



The lobby of Maranatha CRC features a fabric sculpture by a local artist on its central chandelier. The congregation worships in the newly-built facility in downtown Belleville, Ont.

the evidence? Who assembled the information? Who bound the evidence? How many eyes had seen it before it was placed in the hands of the team?

The small council described in Rupke's article as "distinctive" is in fact a hand-picked group of supporters of the healing ministry. That group is now in their second term without the benefit of elections or even real democratic nominations. Only known supporters of the healing ministry were allowed to be on the ballot in elections almost a year ago, despite other members having been nominated. Open elections and nominations would have resulted in a real examination of practices and principles, and that would mean that real accountability would be the norm rather than the exception here.

Currently, from the outside, Maranatha appears to be functioning well. Many have left, including many long term, respected leaders in the church. New faces continue to appear, drawn by a warm accepting atmosphere and exciting music and programs. Many who come have used the healing and restoration services or are in some way associated with someone who is a client there. As these new faces fill the church, the collective memory of the faces that have left over the past decade is fading.

The matter will be before Synod in June. May the Lord give our delegates wisdom as they weigh the evidence before them.

Chris Verra is a freelance journalist and former member of Maranatha CRC in Belleville. He and his family currently attend Community CRC in Frankford, Ont.





## Columns

## Our World Today

Bert Hielema

The official report on climate change will be submitted to the 2012 Christian Reformed Church Synod meeting in Ancaster, Ont. Given the constraints a church committee works under – having to adhere to their historical confessions and statements of faith – it is no surprise that this well-documented 120 page presentation hits all the conventional buttons. The result will be that, with little new said, the otherwise excellent analysis will have minimum impact.

I suggest an alternative way of looking at climate change and will propose suggestions that better suit the challenging times we live in. Since, in my opinion, climate change is fundamentally a religious matter – the direct consequence of worshiping the idol of economic growth – the answer must therefore also be a religious one.

According to T.H. Huxley, “It is the customary fate of new truths to begin as heresies.” And so in the article that follows I will put forth four “heresies” which, I trust, will give a different slant to the debate.

#### Heresy # 1: We are not only stewards but primarily owners of creation.

On what grounds do I base ownership? Every morning, for close to 60 years – that’s how long my wife and I have been married – I read a psalm at breakfast time. So I’m slowly getting the hang of them. Psalm 8 tells me God has given us power over creation, “put everything under our feet.” In other words, we are on top, we are in charge. Possession, as the saying goes, is 99 percent of ownership. Psalm 25 says that we will inherit the land. Psalm 115 goes further: “the heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to man,” (verse 16).

There’s more. For 27 years I have written a daily 400 word meditation on a bible text from the lectionary: 27 x 365 x 400 adds up to almost 4 million words.

Here is an example of my musings:

The word covenant plays a large role in scripture. 1 Samuel 18:3 relates how David and Jonathan sealed their covenant by exchanging their clothing, weapons, and even their claim to Israel’s kingship. God did the same with us in Genesis 9. Just imagine: the mighty God, creator of heaven and earth, solemnly agreed that “I give everything I have to you – even my son – if you give me your heart.” Yes, God gave us the earth and all that is in it.

#### Heresy # 2: Demons are in charge.

Meditating on Matthew 4 made me realize that the fallen Archangel now calls the shots on earth and that we sold out to him. How else can I interpret the devil’s offer to transfer the earth to Jesus if only he bow down and worship him? Jesus doesn’t refute his claim by saying “wait a minute, Psalm 24 says that the world belongs to God.”

Of course the world belongs to God, just as the *Mona Lisa* and Rembrandt’s *De Nachtwacht* will always be associated with their creators but now have different owners. Jesus tacitly admits that Satan owns the store.

One of my many books is by the late Johan Herman Bavinck (1895-1964), former professor at the Free University in Amsterdam. In his *De Mensch en zijn Wereld* (Man and his world), Bavinck makes a surprising statement, and I translate: “Something has happened in creation, something we cannot understand, but of which we experience the horrible consequences day in day out. The world is in the grip of demons. Demonic powers have thrown themselves on nature, on humanity, on the entire radiant creation.... It is a demonic world in which we live, of which we experience its terrible result every hour.... The Kingdom has been broken. That is the deep tragedy, now filling the life of the world. That also means that God has surrendered his very own creation to satanic forces.”

That makes sense to me. As a teenager I experienced the European war where I saw Satan’s hand in all the horrors of the Holocaust and German cruelty. People often get turned off by God, blaming him for everything bad: the World Wars, 9/11, etc., but these are not God’s doing. The follies of Iraq and Afghanistan, the mess in the Middle East, the quest for perpetual economic growth, our cancers and now climate change and world-wide pollution is all Satan’s doing.

#### Heresy # 3: The kingdom is the (new) creation.

Bavinck equates God’s kingdom with the cosmos: its plants and trees, animals and humans, sea and earth, mountain and valley, all of which are now in hostile hands. Satan’s latest attack, “climate change,” affects everybody. Bavinck also emphasizes that we, as Adam, belong to *Adamah*, the Hebrew word for the life-bearing earth which will be restored upon Jesus’ return. That’s why we are connected to the earth that carries us and feeds us and will be our habitat also in eternity: not heaven as most churches tell us. Even *Time* magazine is “Rethinking Heaven.”

That the cosmos is the kingdom is also the opinion of Herman Ridderbos when he writes in his *The Coming of the Kingdom*: “For the kingdom is nothing but the commencement of the new world ... which will reveal itself after the catastrophic upheaval of the present era.”

We live in a world where upheaval is the (dis)order of the day. In the preface to James Lovelock’s book *The Revenge of Gaia*



Genesis 2:9 depicts “trees pleasing to the eye and good for food.”

*Earth Climate in Crisis and the Future of Humanity* I read that “We have driven the Earth to a crisis state from which it may never, on a human time scale, return to the lush and comfortable world we love and in which we grew up.” In *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*, Bill McKibben writes in a similar vein:

“Our old familiar globe is suddenly melting, drying, acidifying, flooding, and burning in ways that no human has ever seen. We have created, in very short order, a new planet, still recognizable but fundamentally different.”

Indeed our world today is well depicted in Isaiah 24, “The earth is defiled by its people; they have ... broken the everlasting covenant.”

At work here is GREED. Genesis 2:9 points to “trees pleasing to the eye and good for food,” giving priority to the aesthetic over the economic. Satan (Genesis 3:6) reversed the order: “Good for food and pleasing to the eye,” making the economic greed – more important than the aesthetic. Climate change is the direct result.

There is no doubt in my mind that we live in perilous times. As far as climate change is concerned nobody knows the tipping point, the instant when a small change suddenly screws up everything. Due to our prodigious burning of fossil fuels the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere is growing

super-exponentially, greatly accelerating the rate of change.

Already we have melting permafrost, soaring methane release, dying forests, acidic oceans, vanishing ice-cap albedo. These are just a few of the factors at the heart of global climate feedback loops, any one of which could be dangerous but taken all together become a crisis that completely dwarfs the problem of CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations alone.

#### Heresy #4: We are destroying this world and must prepare for the world to come.

Nothing will keep our world from total self-destruction. Human greed guarantees this: no miraculous universal conversion will come. Our challenge as church members is not to save our world, as Jesus has already done that. What we must do is imagine eternity, dream dreams, see visions and, wherever possible, implement creative ways to live responsibly as earth-owners in preparation for Christ’s return when the renewed earth out of the blue descends on us. It is our glorious task to get ready for this transition so that our entry to perfect life is seamless. In this late hour that is our radical religious charge. Seminaries true to their root – semen = seed – should train people to sow seeds to prepare God’s people for this glorious future.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer starts his *Creation and Fall* with the amazing words, “The church of Christ witnesses to the end of all things. It lives from the end, it thinks from the end, it acts from the end, it proclaims its message from the end.” This is perfectly biblical writing taking the cue from Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. The Greek word for “end” is “telos.” Jesus, in Matthew 5, tells us not to act like pagans but to “be telos-minded as I am telos-minded.” The Greek word Jesus used is “teleios,” referring to the perfection and wholeness of the New Creation. It is that sort of attitude that has to rule the lives of us Christians in these last days.

Bert Hielema is the translator of Roel Haan’s *De Economie van de Eerbieb* published by Eerdmans as *The Economics of Honor: Biblical Reflections on Money and Property*. He is also the author of *The Shortest Day and Day Without End*, available at [bertahielema.ca](http://bertahielema.ca).

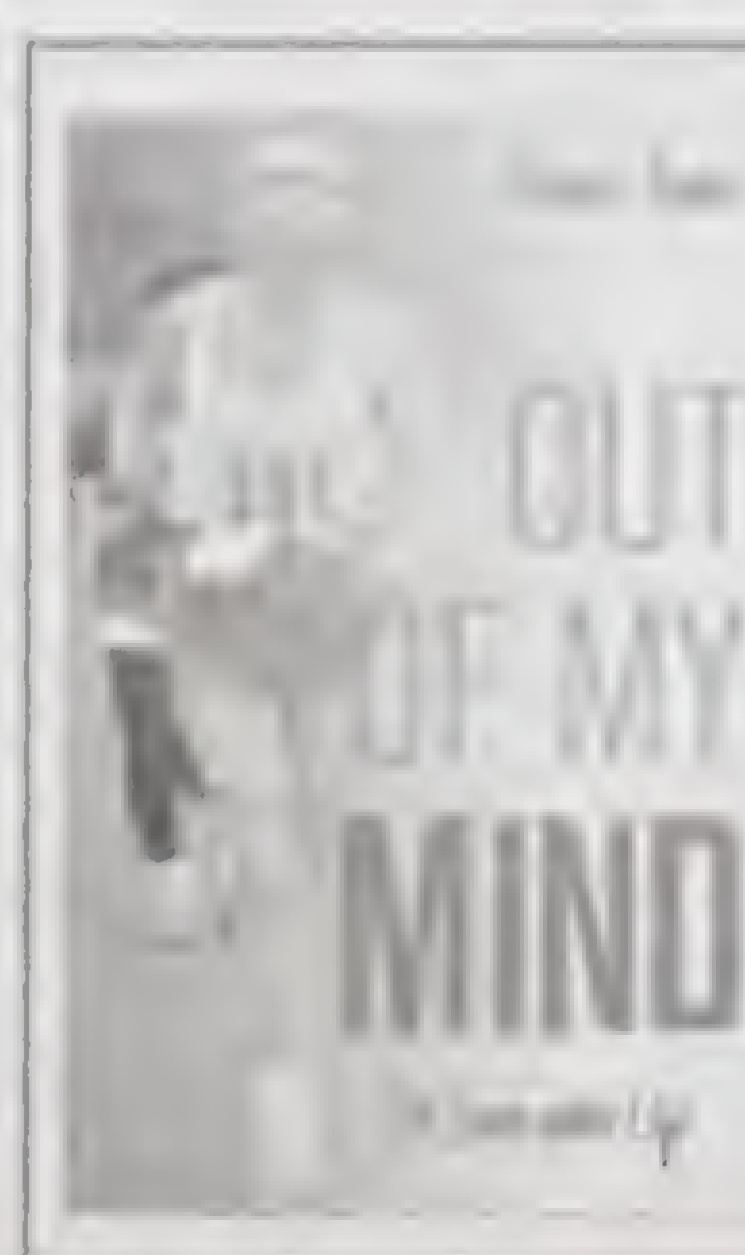
Francis Ruiter, author of “*Journal of a Dutch Immigrant*” introduces his second book.

#### Out of my Mind: In love with Life

Francis continues to recount stories of his past. He reflects on life’s hopes and fears, sorrow and joys. In his final entry, “Facing Darkness,” the author relates his confrontation with and emotional triumph over, a diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease.

This book also includes some interesting “Poetry.” Francis’ books are available in Christian Book stores and in Chapters and Indigo stores or it can be ordered on-line at [Amazon.ca](http://Amazon.ca).

Email Francis at: [francisruiter@shaw.ca](mailto:francisruiter@shaw.ca)





Classifieds / Features

Anniversaries			Obituaries
<p>"Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord Unto Me!"</p> <p>It is with many thanks to God that we announce the <b>50th wedding anniversary</b> of our parents,</p> <p><b>ROBERT AND ANN BRINKERT (nee Straatsma)</b> on June 2, 2012.</p> <p>An Open House will be held at Bethel Christian Reformed Church 117 Windsor Drive, Brockville, Ont. on Saturday June 2, 2012 from 2-4 p.m. (D.V.) Best wishes only!</p> <p>Congratulations and much love from your children,</p> <p>Ingrid Schilstra (Wilfred) - Smithville, Ont. Robert Brinkert (Rose) - St. Ann's, Ont. Caroline Brinkert (Tim) - Brockville, Ont. Elaine de Kroon (Allen) - Lyn, Ont. grandchildren and great grandchildren.</p> <p>Address: 2 Cummings Rd. Lyn ON K6T 1B4 or email at robert_brinkert@sympatico.ca</p>	<p>1962 - June 1 - 2012</p> <p>We would like to congratulate our parents on the occasion of their <b>50th wedding anniversary</b>.</p> <p><b>JERRY AND WINNIE HOYTEMA (nee Postma)</b></p> <p><i>He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge.</i> Psalm 91:4</p> <p>We thank the Lord for them and their commitment and love for each other, and the love they have always shown us. We love you very much.</p> <p>George &amp; Iris Hoytema Kevin, Michelle, Brandyn Judy &amp; Bill Vanderlingen Brittany, Stephanie, Ashley, Zachary Bert &amp; Jennifer Hoytema Nolan, Gage Michelle &amp; Joel Ezinga Katie, Rachil, Ally, Jenny, Jordan</p> <p>Home address: 507 - 20 Northshore Blvd. Burlington ON L7T 1A1</p>	<p>1952 June 9 2012 Gaastmeer, Neth. Brockville, Ont.</p> <p>Praise God from whom all blessings flow! With thankfulness to God for his faithfulness, we celebrate the <b>60th anniversary</b> of our parents, Grandparents and great-grandparents</p> <p><b>BILL AND GAYLE RUTGERS (nee Bakker)</b></p> <p>There will be an open house reception at Bethel Christian Reformed Church 117 Windsor Drive, Brockville, Ont. on Saturday, June 9, 2012 from 2-4 p.m.</p> <p>Much love and congratulations from your children: Shirley and Rick Schmidt, Brantford, Ont. Fenna and Bill Zylstra, Nepean, Ont. Rita and Brian Deines, Brockville, Ont. Harry and Linda Rutgers, L'Orignal, Ont. 11 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren</p> <p>Best Wishes may be sent to: B. Rutgers 1006 Aspen Drive Brockville ON K6V 7G2</p>	<p><b>Klaas IJzerman</b></p> <p><i>I know that my Redeemer lives. Job 19:25</i></p> <p>Klaas was called home to be with his Lord and Saviour on May 12, 2012 at the age of 81 years.</p> <p>Beloved husband for 54 years to Margaret IJzerman (nee Spoelstra). Loving father of: Aleida IJzerman, Oakville, Ont. Anthony (Sue) IJzerman, Georgetown, Ont. Janet (Frank) Wielemaker, Kelowna, B.C. Marian IJzerman, Dexter, Mich. Loving opa of Alicia, Margaret, Jesse, Erika, Andre, Caleb, Jarrod, Moira and Caleb</p> <p>Correspondence: Margaret IJzerman KT 1206-35 Kingknoll Dr Brampton ON L6Y 5G5</p>
			<p><b>Reverend Gerrit Jan Heersink</b></p> <p>After blessing him with 85 beautiful years of life, the Lord took His loving and faithful servant home on Saturday, May 12th, 2012, when Gerrit passed away suddenly at Peterborough Regional Health Centre.</p> <p>Beloved husband of the late Iefke Heersink (nee Paul) for 53 years, he is the cherished father of Roland and Elizabeth Heersink, John Heersink, and Paul Heersink and Laura Peetoom. He is sadly missed by his grandchildren Joel (Claudia), Brittney (Ron), Bianca, Brianna, Maxwell (Nicoleen), Samuel and Margaret and his great grandchildren: Erik, Sebastian and newborn Christopher Gerrit (Joel) and Tim and Eva (Brittney).</p> <p>He leaves behind his brother Derk and was predeceased by his brothers Jan and Henk and his sisters Jo and Trudy. He will be remembered fondly by his many nieces and nephews and his supportive and loving church family.</p> <p>Gerrit was born in Aalften, Netherlands on October 24, 1926 and began his ministry in 1957 in the Netherlands and immigrated to Canada with his family in 1961. With his supportive wife Iefke, he served in Hasselt, Netherlands (1957-1961), Cobourg, ON (1961-1964), Clinton, ON (1964-1967), Blenheim, ON (1967-1977), Woody Nook Lacombe, AB (1977-1984), and Barrhead, AB (1984-1991). He also served as a pastor for short periods of time in Chino, CA; Blythe, ON, and Cephas Peterborough, ON. He retired to Peterborough in 1991 where he and Iefke were active and much-loved members of the Cephas CRC community. His memorial service was held on Monday, May 21 in Peterborough.</p> <p>Those who wish to send condolences to the family can send them to 39 Wales Avenue, Markham ON L3P 2C4 or pheersink@gmail.com</p> <p>Those who wish to remember Gerrit by way of donations are asked to remember Rhema Christian School in Peterborough.</p> <p><i>Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34)</i></p>

Caring for the caregiver

Sharon Osvald

With the number of Canadians age 65 years or older expected to double in the next 25 years, a greater number of seniors are going to be caring for their spouses and adult-children caring for their parents. Sandwiched between caring for their growing children and meeting the physical needs of their aging parents, a whole generation of people are becoming caregivers. They are what Bart Mindszenty, co-author of *Parenting Your Parents* and [mycaregivingjourney.com](http://mycaregivingjourney.com) calls, "The Shoulder Generation," shouldering responsibility for everyone.

Caring for someone we love, be it a spouse, parent or relative can be financially, emotionally, physically and psychologically exhausting. The stress, guilt, loneliness, worry and emotional pressures can lead to illness and depression. Here are some tips to keep you a healthy and productive caregiver.

Worry

Just after my father had passed away, I became overwhelmed with a sense of responsibility for my mother. She was almost 80 at the time, but was far from needing a caregiver. Yet, in my mind I had assumed the role. "How would she cope on her own? She didn't like to drive. Could she afford things? What if she had an emergency?" Between visits, anxious phone calls and heavy conversations (all initiated by me) Mom sat me down. "You have got to stop worrying about me," she said. "First of all, you have your own family to care for and secondly, our heavenly father is looking after both of us." We not only worry about our loved one, but what we will face in the future. The whole experience gets under my skin. It leaves me late at night asking questions in the dark. "What will happen to me as I age? Will my husband get like this and will I become his caregiver? What will the future hold? How will I cope?"

Age, sickness - even death - they come whether we worry about them or not. Instead we exchange faith, hope and peace of mind for a false sense of control, believing: "If I

am thinking about the problem, I must be doing something about it." God really does know the beginning from the end and he's got us.

Guilt

Guilt and worry are the two thieves in the night that rob us of our sleep and peace of mind. We look back and say, "What could I have done better? What if I had seen the signs before? What if we'd encouraged her more not to sell her house and set up supports for her there?" Guilt laughs at our helplessness. I believe the Bible wasn't only talking about others when it instructed us to forgive. This is especially true if, without knowing all the future facts, you've made promises to your spouse or parent that you now cannot keep. We must forgive and release ourselves too.

Yes, we must make wise choices, but for the most part life cannot be controlled, managed or manipulated. It is a mystery. This realization can do two things to us. It can paralyse us with fear and anxiety or we can rest in its peace. If we live to be as old as my mother we will say good-bye to those we love. We may be touched by cancer, dementia and loss. Knowing we are not in control means we can relax and enjoy the gifts that come our way and not be robbed by worry or guilt. What's done is done and what is to come will come, but today is God's gift.

Loneliness

The daily responsibility of caring for a parent or spouse is especially isolating. Financial pressures, lack of time and freedom to socialize leaves many people feeling very alone. Often people feel misunderstood in their struggle and even long term friendships begin to change. This can lead us to pull away from the very supports we need. Denise Brown, author of *Caring for the Caregiver* and founder of [caregiving.com](http://caregiving.com), tells us to reach out to other family caregivers, either through a support group in the community or online. "When you connect with others in a similar situation, you lessen the loneliness," says Brown.



Caregivers need to make sure they don't neglect their own health while taking care of someone else.

She also recommends regular walks, journaling and getting help from home care agencies, respite, neighbours, family, friends and day programs. Don't be afraid to reach out to your church community as well. Ask for help when you need it and carve out times for things that encourage your soul - be it through worship, Bible studies or coffee break groups. Don't be ashamed to cry and pray with other when the sadness overwhelms you and it is too difficult to muster up a smile when all you see is sorrow. Are we not instructed to mourn with those who mourn?

Sometimes we fall into the trap of believing no one can care for our loved one like we can. While that might be true, if we don't look after ourselves, we won't be able to look after anyone. I am learning that my mother needs me to care for her, but not become consumed by her care. Our parents and spouses need our love - not our preoccupation. It doesn't help us and it doesn't help them.

And as a caregiver, daily, I must return to my place of faith, remembering whose daughter she really is.

Sharon Osvald is a wife, mother and freelance writer from Brighton, Ont. She has a mother with vascular dementia and writes the web blogs found at [mymotherscaregiver.com](http://mymotherscaregiver.com). Sharon plays the piano and along with her husband leads the best youth praise team on the planet.



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- June 6** Hollandse Dag 10 am at First CRC, 310 Kingscourt Ave., Kingston, Ont. Speaker: Rev John Klomps. For more info call 613-546-5615.
- June 8-9** Immanuel Christian Schools of Lethbridge, Alberta, will celebrate 50 years of God's goodness. For more information, please call the business office at (403) 327-4233 or visit our website at [www.immanuelchristian.org](http://www.immanuelchristian.org)
- June 13** Hollandse Dag, Moorefield Community Centre. See ad.
- June 17** Mountainview CRC Grimsby, will celebrate 50 years. Services will be held on Sunday at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. For more information, please contact the church office @ 905-945-0004 or email [office@mountainviewcrc.org](mailto:office@mountainviewcrc.org)
- June 24** Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Herman Praamsma will be preaching. DVDs are available.
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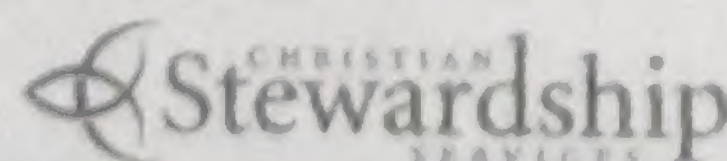
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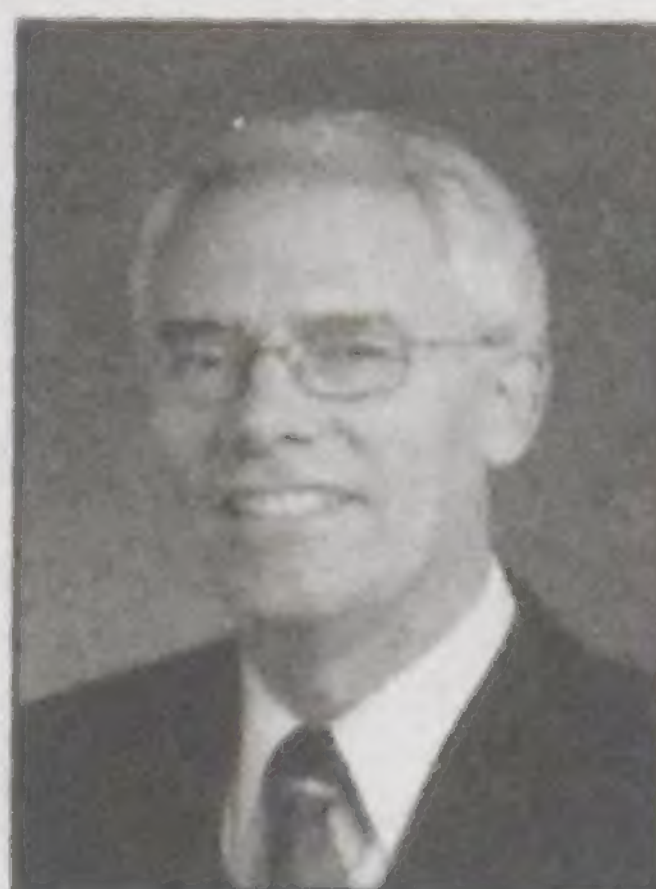
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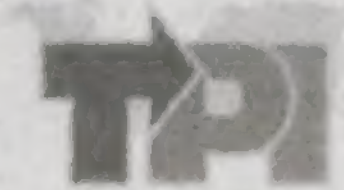
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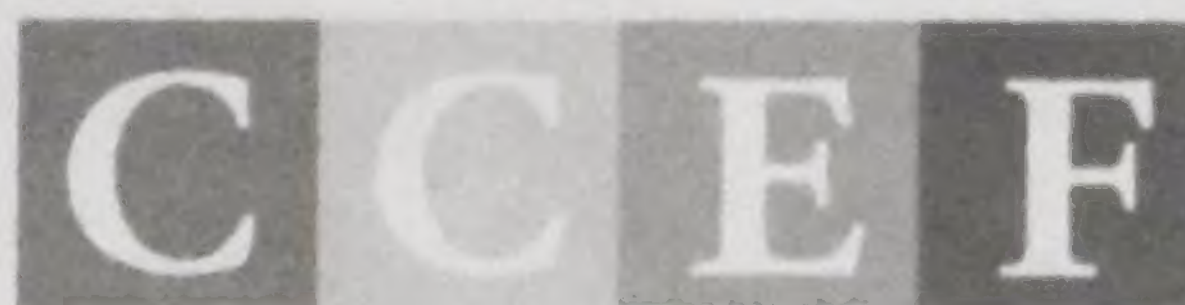
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## News

## The Russian election: a swap achieved

Gary Timmerman

With his re-election on March 4, Vladimir Putin has successfully pulled off his long foretold plan – made four years ago with Dmitry Medvedev – to return to the presidency of the Russian Federation. Putin's bargaining with Medvedev to not contest him in the election in exchange for the post of Prime Minister has turned out to be his most clever move. By accomplishing this, Putin removed from the race the only presidential candidate with significant appeal among Russian people who had a real chance to win. The results, with nearly 65.3 percent of eligible voters participating, put Putin at almost 64 percent of the votes. He was inaugurated this month.

Viewing the run-up to the election from the streets of Saint Petersburg, this observer was not surprised by the outcome, but one could not help but notice some new phenomena appearing in the behaviour of the people and the establishment. Political demonstrations were suddenly authorized, thousands of ordinary citizens marched with placards without fear of being loaded up into lock-up buses, and radio talk-shows streamed daily for hours with people's frank opinions of Vladimir Putin and society's needs at the current crossroads. The Western media painted these expressions of democratic participation as some kind of basic mood shift that was gaining momentum in an ever-growing urban

middle class, but in reality this was not nearly as widespread as presented. As one person stated, "God has not seen Russia yet worthy of a government greater than who he has already raised up, that of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin."

Centuries of wars and autocratic habits of government have produced a submissive society where people long for "father-figure" autocrats to protect and rule them. This is a basic stance that has not changed. As a nation, Russians have passed through such a colossal restructuring of society since 1991 that they are grateful civil war did not overrun them again during the recent Duma elections and Putin's presidential victory. In other parts of the world today where this level of political change occurs, we have seen a lot of blood split along the way.

"Putin reacted wisely following the demonstrations in December," summed up one senior evangelical leader. "He could have given orders to the Interior Security forces to beat down the protesters, locked them up and silenced them, and he had the power to do it. But he did not, he responded democratically and for the Russian situation he did right. Things could have turned for the worst had he not been so wise."

### Fatalism

Russian society has a very short experience in political competitions, but it has a well-nurtured immunity to violence



This picture of a Russian political demonstration was taken on the street where the Timmermans live.

against authorities. The weak slogan of "For Honest Elections" by the majority of protesters bore enough satisfaction to diffuse unrest and grant a sense of having expressed something against the obvious fraudulent results of the December parliamentary vote. Were anyone to demand of himself a vigilant stance against every occurrence of fraud and deception in daily life, there would be little time for productive activity. Living in Russia today requires not only a fatalistic attitude toward corruption in bureaucratic structures, but also a sharpened wariness toward dishonesty and deception in everyday transactions from buying a sausage at the meat shop to extorting apartments from unwitting pensioners. To the extent that "Russian democracy" became activated, a less than perfect election process and "managed democracy" by Putin forces are better than nothing at all, and better than the chaos the country had under Boris Yeltsin.

Another of Saint Petersburg's evangelical leaders shared that he did not vote for Putin's return. "Personally, I see Mikhail Prokhorov as someone who can change our situation, who's younger, from a different generation of thought, but I don't have confidence that he has the ability to lead our country." The urban protest movement rallied around Prokhorov, who portrayed Putin as an obstacle to change and the guardian of a corrupt system of power. Getting only seven percent of the vote, however, the society largely viewed Prokhorov as just another oligarch. Well-read people who examine the political analysis from both the right

and the left find it hard to know who to believe. "One side says we can expect great problems ahead with Putin as president; the economic expert can tell us that Russia has great reserves of gas and oil, a solid state budget with no national debt, and we have a firm future with more of the same with Putin," says one Christian publisher. Older people long for the return of the justice, order, and national pride given them by the Communists' social safety net, but the Communist Party leader, Gennady Zyuganov, received about 17 percent of votes – his highest count in five elections.

### Need for change

As Putin returns to the presidency in May, there's consensus that he is going to have to change some things about himself and how he rules. The world is so full of drastic changes, and he'll have to be adaptable to it. Vladimir Putin cultivates his image as a disciplined and muscular Stalin-era Russian nationalist. He portrays his opponents as a destabilizing minority and pawns of foreign governments. He presented the election not as a choice between himself and the other candidates, but the choice between Putin and chaos. He chose not to engage in an active election campaign, giving only one major campaign speech in a Moscow stadium, and otherwise stuck to his prime ministerial duties. He stood by his record of rebuilding the country's image and overseeing an economic boom in his first presidency. In the Putin years, great investments were made in social work, public housing, medicine and education,

which had fallen into ruins during the 1990s. In a political sense and in an economic sense, Putin has proven himself worthy.

A Christian leadership trainer expressed his lack of enthusiasm for Western-style democracy. "The more I read of what's going on in European and American society, it is very strange to understand. Average Russian people have some kind of idealistic image about Western democracy, like it's some kind of paradise. But people there are ordinary people with sin in their hearts and lives too. I read lots about European society that I don't like – for instance in England, they have forbidden workers to wear a cross around their neck while they're at work! They give children out of Christian orphanages to homosexual couples! How strange can things become? Wow! This is what's called 'democracy' today! Forgive me, that I can't fully understand what's going on in this fast-changing world!"

He continues, "Where mankind creates something without God there are great problems. Most of us understand that European countries long ago ceased calling themselves 'Christian countries,' and North American societies are fast in the same lane, but the highly developed, comfortable societies that they enjoy today were built on [the] principled values, hard work and devotion of their fathers and grandfathers who were largely Christians."

There is some consensus among Christian onlookers as to whether Putin's election result was achieved honestly enough. There were a percentage of fraudulent votes counted, as international observers noted, but it could not have been very significant – not more than 10 percent – which means that Putin would have won without a doubt.

In the arena of Russian politics, we have not yet seen an alternative party elite or leader that can earn the trust and confidence of the people. Choosing stability and less disruption in society, the people have decided that Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin is our best choice so far.

Gary Timmerman (gtimmerman@eemail.net) is a missionary for Christian Reformed World Missions, and has been living in Saint Petersburg, Russia for the past 10 years.

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